NATION

Govt mulls jet fuel tax cut for airlines amid Iran war

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BUSINESS

Markets lose Rs 1.14L crore in March

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SPORTS

Samson, Jadeja to take on ex-pals as CSK meets RR

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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3 jailers suspended as inmates release videos from City jail

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Three prison officials have been suspended after videos allegedly recorded by undertrials inside Parappana Agrahara Central Prison surfaced online, officials said on Sunday. In the clips, inmates purportedly targeted Alok Kumar, claiming they had access to smartphones and alleging that senior officials facilitated their use, even raising the "ee sala cup namde" slogan. The Prison Department denied the allegations, calling them false. Jail warders Niranjan Kamath, Hanumantappa Hadpad and Shivanand Karlabatti were suspended for dereliction of duty. Authorities later seized mobile phones hidden inside a toilet pipe. Active Airtel signals were detected within parts of the prison, prompting a warning to the telecom provider —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Vijay to contest from Perambur, Trichy East

CHENNAI, 29 MARCH

TVK Chief Vijay on Sunday named his party's candidates for all 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu for the April 23 elections, announcing his electoral debut from two seats, including Perambur in Chennai, considered a DMK stronghold. In his maiden electoral battle, Vijay will also contest from Tiruchirappalli (East) in central Tamil Nadu. "It will be C Joseph Vijay from these two seats," the actor-turned-politician announced emphatically amid loud cheers at a meeting of party functionaries.—*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 3

4 children drown at a farm pond in Yadgir

YADGIR, 29 MARCH

Four children drowned after entering a farm pond to swim in Yadgir district on Sunday, police said. The incident occurred in Naganur village in Surapura taluk, under the jurisdiction of the Kembhavi police station in Yadgir. The deceased were identified as Kirana, 6, Basamma, 11, Sharath, 6, and Hanumesh, 7, police said. According to the police, the children had gone to the pond as it was a school holiday. "The children are believed to have entered the pond to swim and accidentally drowned. All four died on the spot," a police officer said.

—*SALAR NEWS*

Airlines to scrap selection fee on 60% of seats

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Airlines will start offering at least 60 per cent of seats on flights free of additional charge from 20 April, according to the DGCA. The civil aviation ministry announced on 18 March that directions had been issued for airlines to allocate a minimum of 60 per cent of seats free, ensuring fair access for passengers. The DGCA issued an amended Air Transport Circular on 20 March, effective from 20 April. The circular states that "60 per cent of seats in any flight shall be offered free of charge" and that airlines should maintain transparent seat allocation policies.—*PTI*

Smoke rises from a building following an Israeli aristrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon —*PTI*

US readies 'for weeks of ground operations' in Iran

Iran says 'will rain fire' as 3,500 US troops arrive

DUBAI, 29 MARCH

As one of the US largest amphibious assault ships with 3,500 Marines entered into active combat theatre, Iran said it was waiting to "rain fire" upon US troops in the event of a ground invasion.

The Pentagon is preparing for weeks of ground operations in Iran, although it's not clear whether US President Donald Trump has approved them, Washington Post reported, citing sources, as the USS Tripoli arrived in CENTCOMs area of responsibility with dozens more jets and helicopters.

The USS Tripoli joins the US nuclear-powered aircraft carriers already deployed in the region. The USS George HW Bush carrier strike group has is heading towards the West Asia as thousands more troops are en route to the region.

In the face of the massive deployment, Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, said Tehran "are waiting for the arrival of American troops on the ground to set them on fire". He accused Washington of feigning interest in negotiation, while ramping up its military presence in West Asia.

"The enemy sends messages of friendship openly, while secretly plotting a ground invasion," Ghalibaf said.

A high-level diplomatic talk aimed at finding an end to the war featuring the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan was underway in Islamabad.

- The USS Tripoli joins the US nuclear-powered aircraft carriers already deployed in the region. The USS George HW Bush carrier strike group has is heading towards the West Asia.

Notably, the massive deployment of troops comes even after Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US could achieve its military objectives without deploying ground troops.

Meanwhile, Iran threatened to strike the US aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to avenge the sinking of Iranian warship IRIS Dena near Sri Lanka. At least 80 people were killed when the US sunk the ship, which was a guest of India. —*Agencies*

>>> More on Pgs 4, 5, 6 & 7

2 more Indian tankers carrying LPG cross Hormuz

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers, carrying roughly a day's supply of the country's cooking gas, have safely navigated through the war-hit Strait of Hormuz.

The tankers are expected to reach Indian shores in the next couple of days. "Two LPG carriers, BW TYR and BW ELM, carrying a combined LPG cargo of about 94,000 tonnes, have safely transited the region and are moving towards Indian shores," an official statement said.

While BW TYR is proceeding towards Mumbai with an expected arrival on 31 March, BW ELM is on way to New Mangalore with an estimated arrival date of 1 April.

With the strait all but shut, it is sourcing LPG from nations like the US and Argentina.

"A total of 18 Indian-flagged vessels with 485 Indian seafarers remain in the western Persian Gulf region," the statement said.

Originally, there were 28 Indian-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz when the war in West Asia broke out. Of these, 24 were on the West side of the strait and four on the East side. In the last few days, six vessels from the west side and two from the east have managed to sail to safety.

India relies on imports from Gulf nations to meet as much as 60 per cent of its cooking gas needs.

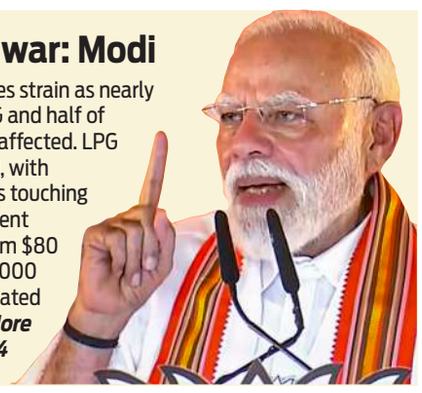
LPG carriers Jag Vikram, Green Asha and Green Sanvi are still in the western Strait of Hormuz. One empty vessel is being filled with LPG.

The US and Israel attacks on Iran and Tehran's sweeping retaliation have all but halted shipping through the strait. —*PTI*

While BW TYR is proceeding towards Mumbai with an expected arrival on 31 March, BW ELM is on way to New Mangalore with an estimated arrival date of 1 April. —*PTI*

'Challenging' situation due to Iran war: Modi

Narendra Modi on Sunday urged citizens to remain united and responsible amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, calling it a "challenging" time in his 'Mann Ki Baat' address. He warned against rumours and criticised attempts to politicise the crisis, saying such actions could harm national interest and Indians abroad. Modi said the government is working to limit the war's impact, particularly on energy supplies. India faces strain as nearly 90 per cent of LPG and half of crude imports are affected. LPG prices have surged, with black-market rates touching Rs 4,000, while Brent crude has risen from $80 to $120. Over 3,75,000 Indians wee evacuated from Gulf. ***>>>More on Pgs 3 & 4***



—*WIKIPEDIA/X*

'Possessed' man tries to open flight's emergency door

VARANASI, 29 MARCH

Passengers and crew had a spooky experience aboard an IndiGo flight when a person tried to open the emergency exit door minutes before landing and later claiming he was "possessed by a ghost".

IndiGo flight 6E-185 from Bengaluru to Varanasi took off from Bengaluru around 8.15pm, and among the passengers was a man named Mohammad Adnan (inset) from Mau district in Uttar Pradesh.

Just 15 minutes into the journey, Adnan attempted to tamper with the emergency door. The cabin crew detected this and warned him not to repeat the action.

However, when the plane 500 feet in the air, Adnan tried to open the emergency exit door once again. The pilot demonstrated presence of mind and aborted that landing attempt.

A go-around was conducted and the plane landed at 10.35pm. Adnan was immediately handed over to the airline's security personnel and the Central Industrial Security Force.

A case was registered against him. —*Agencies*

UCC WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN ASSAM: SHAH

DHEKIAJULI/TIHU, 29 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that the BJP government has halted infiltration in Assam but claimed it is "not enough" and that every illegal immigrant must be deported.

He announced that a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will soon be implemented in the state, aiming to "ban four marriages among a particular community," and accused Congress of trying to protect infiltrators by keeping borders porous "in their greed for a vote bank," which has altered Assam's demography.

Shah highlighted that the Himanta Biswa Sarma government has "freed" 125,000 acres of land from encroachers and vowed to ensure no land remains under infiltrators' control in five years. He also criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for opposing electoral roll revisions to protect infiltrators. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

DMK manifesto woos women with Rs 8,000 coupons & free travel

CHENNAI, 29 APRIL

MK Stalin on Sunday unveiled the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam manifesto for the April 23 Assembly polls, announcing an Rs 8,000 'Illatharasi' coupon scheme for women to purchase or replace household appliances. The one-time benefit will be given to women heads of families not in the income tax bracket.

The manifesto outlines a wide range of welfare measures across sectors. Key promises include expanding health insurance cover to Rs 10 lakh, increasing pensions for the elderly, widows and unmarried women above 50 to Rs 2,000 per month, and doubling assistance under the Kalaignar Magalir Urumai Thogai scheme to Rs 2,000 while adding new beneficiaries.

In education, the government plans to extend the Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme up to Class 8, raise student stipends under Pudhumai Penn and Tamil Pudhalvan schemes to Rs 1,500, and distribute 35 lakh free laptops to college students. Skill training for five lakh youth with a monthly stipend of Rs 1,500 has also been promised.

For farmers, Stalin pledged free modern electric pump sets, higher procurement prices, Rs 3,500 per quintal for paddy and Rs 4,500 per tonne for sugarcane and continued support for free electricity.

The party also promised to build 10 lakh concrete houses under housing schemes, attract Rs 18 lakh crore in investments to generate 50 lakh jobs, and develop four global cities around Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai and Tiruchirappalli, alongside 50 Semmozhi Poongas.

Stalin expressed confidence of returning to power for a seventh term, calling the manifesto a "superstar" and highlighting ongoing welfare schemes benefiting over 1.31 crore women. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

DMK President MK Stalin releases of party's manifesto at Anna Arivalayam, in Chennai, on Sunday —*PTI*

FINE UP TO RS 10,000

T'gana to deduct salary of those neglecting parents

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

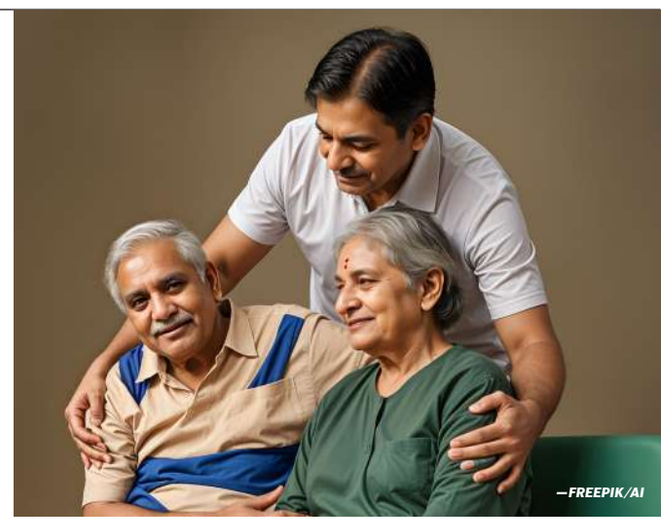
The Telangana Legislative Assembly on Sunday passed the 'Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Bill, 2026', mandating salary deductions from individuals who neglect their parents to ensure financial security for senior citizens.

The law applies to government and private employees as well as public representatives, including MLAs, MLCs, corporators and sarpanches. It provides for a deduction of 15 per cent of salary or 10,000, whichever is lower, with the amount directly transferred to parents who report neglect. Complaints will be examined through a quasi-judicial process by a designated authority, likely the District Collector, while a proposed Senior Citizens Commission will act as the appellate body.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said the Bill goes beyond the existing Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 by extending coverage to private employees and elected representatives. He described the legislation as a social responsibility aimed at reinforcing moral values and ensuring accountability. Citing the case of Vijaypat Singhania, who was allegedly neglected after transferring his assets, Reddy said those who fail to care for their parents must be brought under the law.

He termed it unfortunate that such legislation was necessary, asserting that individuals who neglect their parents "have no right to live in society". Minister Konda Surekha echoed the sentiment, calling for a change in societal attitudes towards the elderly.

BJP MLA Payal Shankar termed the Bill a first-of-its-kind initiative and suggested enhancing the penalty amount, while CPI leader K Sambasiva Rao also extended support. —*PTI*



—*FREEPIK/AI*

— WIKIMEDIA

Prez to visit Siddaganga Mutt on 1 April

TUMAKURU, 29 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu will visit Siddaganga Mutt on 1 April to participate in the 119th birth anniversary celebrations of Shivakumara Swamiji, who died at 111 in 2019. Siddalinga Swamiji described the visit as "a moment of pride" for Tumakuru, noting it's the district's first presidential visit and only the second by a woman president. Murmu will visit the memorial, perform rituals, and attend a main programme scheduled between 11 am and noon, lasting about an hour to an hour-and-a-half. The event will feature cultural performances, including a veena recital and devotional poetry by 119 women, along with a community meal. Swamiji urged the media not to raise the issue of Bharat Ratna for Shivakumara Swamiji during the visit of the President. —*PTI*

Mysuru man held for several fake bomb threats

MYSURU, 29 MARCH

Police arrested a Mysuru man on Sunday for allegedly sending hoax bomb threats to schools, courts, and government offices across India. The suspect, Srinivas, was apprehended at his home in Brindavan Extension following a joint operation by local VV Puram police and Delhi police. He had allegedly sent multiple threat emails over the past month, warning of explosions and causing widespread alarm, causing authorities to take notice and launch an operation. "It was found that the messages were being sent from Mysuru. A Delhi Police team conducted a raid and apprehended the accused," sources said. Police seized several SIM cards and a laptop allegedly used to send the hoax messages. The accused is being taken to Delhi for questioning. —*PTI*

Cong betrayed minorities: BYV in Davangere

DAVANGERE, 29 MARCH

State BJP President BY Vijayendra said on Sunday the "the Congress has betrayed the minorities," as he visited Davangere and Hubballi for the upcoming bypolls.

"Minorities have only been used as a vote bank. The Congress has betrayed their trust only to gain power," Vijayendra said in Davangere. ""The BJP, on the other hand, believes in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea of Sab ka Saat, Sab ka Vikas. We are trying to include every community in the development efforts."

The Congress had faced internal competition when deciding candidates for the upcoming Davangere (South) bypoll. Although it decided to field late MLA Shamanur Shivashankarappa's grandson Samarth, Sadiq Pailwan briefly attempted to contest due to the prominent presence of Muslims in the constituency. —*Agencies*

3 jailers suspended as inmates release videos

Top Cop: Videos leaked to slander B'luru prison's reputation

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Videos leaked by news outlets purportedly show inmates of Parappana Agrahara Central Prison using phones and shouting 'ee sala cup namde'—*SCREENGRAB*

Three prison officials have been suspended after videos allegedly recorded by under-trial prisoners inside Parappana Agrahara Central Prison were released, officials said on Sunday.

In the videos that were released by a news portal, the prisoners purportedly targeted the Director General of Police (Prisons) Alok Kumar. The prisoners were heard making claims about that the phones were given by senior officials and said "ee sala cup namde", a fan slogan for RCB.

The Prison Department denied claims of officials providing mobile phones. However, jail warders Niranjan Kamath, Hanumantappa Hadpad and Shivanand Karlabatti were suspended for "dereliction of duty", Alok said.

Action has also been initiated against the Jailer who was allegedly on supervisory duty at the time of the video recording, he said.

Three video clippings were released from the Bengaluru jail in a local news portal around 9am on Saturday, Alok said.

"One of our media friends shared those clippings with me. Chief Superintendent Anshu Kumar, and his team found out the mischief mongers and seized the mobile phones which were hidden inside the pipe in the toilet chamber," he added.

The main accused in the case are the prisoners Darshan and Abhi, linked to the Hennur Bande murder case, while the voice in the clips was identified as that of Zypsin Daniel, another prisoner.

"To derail the process of reform, these prisoners deliberately shared the clippings with the media to bring a bad name and to demoralise the top hierarchy of the Prison and Correctional Services department," Alok claimed.

A complaint has been filed at the Parappana Agrahara Central Prison Police Station.

DGP (Prisons) Alok Kumar —*PTI*

He also flagged the issue of mobile connectivity inside the prison.

"Presence of Airtel signal has been found in some parts of the prison. We are issuing a warning to them to take adequate measures to rectify the issue," he said.

"The process of reforms in the Prison and Correctional Services department will go on despite a few vested interests trying to subvert the process. Our team of officers and men have been working very hard to implement the proposed changes," Alok added.

The reforms were suggested by a panel after a series of videos purported to show inmates, including notorious criminals and terror suspects, partying and receiving preferential treatment in the Bengaluru prison surfaced last year. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during the passing-out parade of 46th batch of Civil Police Sub-Inspector trainees, in Mysuru, on Sunday —*SALAR*

Police must have self-discipline, patience: CM

MYSURU, 29 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday advised police personnel to develop self-discipline, and patience, and deploy a human approach while performing their duty.

Adressing the passing-out parade of 46th batch of Civil Police Sub-Inspector trainees at the parade ground in Mysuru, he called on the newly inducted officers to uphold justice without compromise and work towards building a drug-free and equitable society.

As even the Constitution aimed to provide justice to weaker sections of the society, police must ensure that they give special protection to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and other vulnerable sections, he stated.

Citing Mahatma Gandhi, he said that "true independence of India could only be achieved when women walked freely on streets at midnight".

He also said the government would fill the 8,000 vacant posts in the police department over the next two years, as promised in the Budget. He said his government has recruited 4,911 police personnel including 42nd batch of 327 civil Police Sub Inspectors over the last three years.

He also announced a reward of Rs 2 lakh for Karnataka Police Academy officers and staff. Home Minister G Parameshwara, Ministers HC Mahadevappa and K Venkatesh and DGP/IGP MA Saleem were present. —*Salar News*

13-year-old dies after treatment by 'quack'

RAICHUR, 29 MARCH

A 13-year-old girl died after receiving treatment from an alleged fake doctor for a common fever, in Raichur district. The 9th-grade girl was a resident of Aminagadh village in Maski taluk of Raichur district.

"On 26 March, the child developed a fever, following which her grandmother took her to a man named Uttam Kumar Sarkar, who claimed to be an RMP (Registered Medical Practitioner)," police said.

She was staying with her grandmother as her parents had gone to Bengaluru to for daily wage work, Sub-Inspector of police Guru Chandraiah Yadav, told Salar News.

"The accused treated child and administered an injection. Initially, no complications were observed. After receiving treatment, she even went to attend her examination. However, by night, rashes began appearing on her body, and she started suffering from severe pain," Yadav said.

She was then admitted to Manvi Hospital, but despite treatment she breathed her last on Friday.

The parents alleged that the "fake doctor" and the injection he administered is responsible for their daughter's death.

Raichur District Health Officer (DHO) Surendra Babu told Salar News that Uttam is not a doctor.

"There are several such individuals and even some students posing as doctors in many villages," he cautioned. "In the district, a few days ago, we conducted raids on more than 100 fake clinics."

However, social activist Gurudas told Salar News that the issue was prevalent across the State, not only in Raichur.

"At the taluk level, the problem of such fake doctors is on the rise," he said. He noted that the government had launched a crackdown on fake doctors, but the menace is now on the increase again.

A case was registered at the Kavital Police station. The accused is absconding and efforts are on to nab him, Yadav said. —*Salar News*

A procession in Chikkaballapur marks Palm Sunday, celebrated on the Sunday before Easter and commemorating Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem; Devotees hold palm-leaf crosses at St Andrew's Church in Bengaluru —*SALAR/MOHAMMED ASAD*

Palm Sunday observed in Chikkaballapur

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 29 MARCH

Palm Sunday was observed with devotion and solemnity at CSI Christ Church, Chikkaballapur, where special prayers were offered for global peace and harmony.

Addressing the gathering, Rev Praveen, Pastor of CSI Christ Church, emphasised the significance of Palm Sunday, recalling the historic entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem as a symbol of peace.

He noted that Christ chose to ride a donkey, representing humility and peace, rather than a horse, which symbolises war. This message, he said, remains deeply relevant in today's world marked by conflict and unrest.

Rev Praveen highlighted that the event, which is believed to have occurred over two thousand years ago, continues to be commemorated worldwide as Palm Sunday.

Following the prayer service, a procession was held through the main streets, with enthusiastic participation from members of the church. Devotees sang hymns and expressed their faith during the procession.

Children of the church presented tableaux depicting significant moments from the life of Jesus Christ. The performances, accompanied by traditional costumes, added a spiritual dimension to the event. Prominent members, including V Das, Henry Prasanna Kumar, J Kiran Victor, Swamy Das, Adarsh and Rajashekhar participated in the event. —*Salar News*

50YRS OF PURVANKARA

People take part in a 10K run during Puravankara's 50-year celebrations on Bagalur Main Road in Bengaluru on Sunday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

27 children undergo free heart surgery in Chikkaballapur

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 29 MARCH

A total of 27 children with congenital got a new lease of life after undergoing free heart surgery at Sathya Sai Grama in Muddenahalli in Chikkaballapur district.

A team of medical personnel conducted the surgeries were conducted at a camp organized at the Sri Madhusudan Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre.

Several of the cases were critically advanced and had previously been declined for treatment at other reputed hospitals due to their high-risk involved.

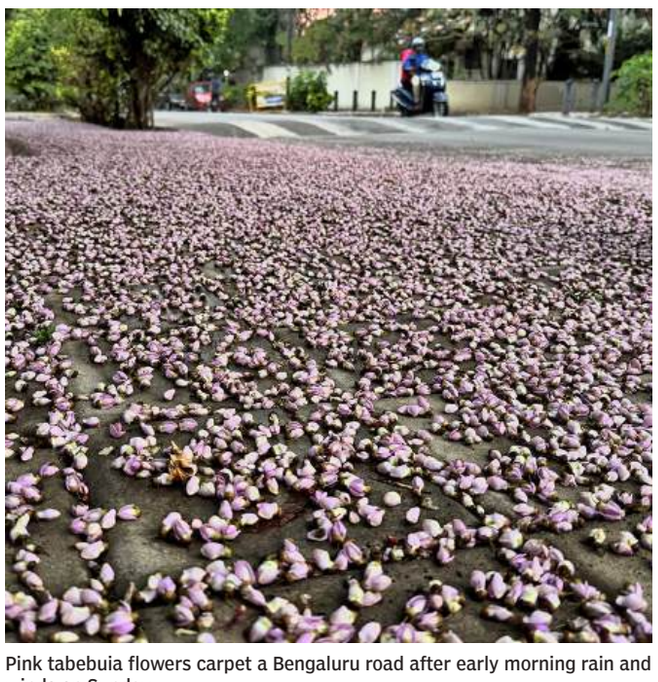
This initiative was undertaken under the 'One World One Family' mission founded by Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai, with clinical support from the United Kingdom-based Healing Little Hearts Foundation.

Annie Aravind, pediatric cardiologist said, "We are pleased to note that all surgical procedures have been successful, and the children are currently in the recovery phase."

Patients from Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jammu & Kashmir participated in the medical camp.

Rafiq Ahmed from Challakere in Chitradurga said, "Surgery in private hospitals cost around Rs 2-3 lakh. However, here my son was provided with free medical treatment, accommodation and food." —*Salar News*

SCENES FROM THE CITY



Pink tabebuia flowers carpet a Bengaluru road after early morning rain and winds on Sunday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

LAUDS BELAGAVI FISHERMEN

PM lauds 'Anveshana' for promoting research in schools

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

The Anveshana programme of Bengaluru's Prayoga Institute of Education Research has won praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who called it a "model initiative" for making scientific research accessible in schools

Commending the programme during his radio address, 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi underscored the importance of practice-led and experiential learning in building scientific temper among students.

He further said the initiative offers students hands-on research experience and a platform to publish their work.

Modi's recognition brings national attention to Anveshana's research-based pedagogy, which enables school students to engage in scientific inquiry beyond conventional classroom learning.

Anveshana has supported several student-led research projects across disciplines, many of which were published in international journals —*PEXELS*

The programme allows students from classes 9 to 12 to work under the mentorship of experienced scientists, providing access to laboratory infrastructure and real-world scientific challenges.

Launched in 2022, Anveshana has supported multiple student-led research projects across disciplines, several of which have been published in internationally recognised peer-reviewed journals.

Prayoga founder and chief mentor HS Nagaraja said the initiative currently reaches over 12,000 government school students, offering hands-on learning opportunities free of cost.

Four rural students from Karnataka were recently recognised for their research in green chemistry.

Meanwhile, Modi also lauded a farmer from Belagavi for his success in fish farming during his 'Mann Ki Baat' address, citing it as an example of how innovation in agriculture can boost incomes and inspire rural youth.

The farmer, Raju Shivalingappa Huddar, 27, from Bodakyanatti village in Belagavi taluk, has adopted biofloc technology, to cultivate murrel (snakehead) fish. He established four scientifically designed ponds and sourced fish seed from Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. He gained hands-on training in fish farming techniques. —*PTI*

Kharge unveils Cong's 5 guarantees for Assam

Manifesto vows cash aid for women, ₹25L healthcare cover, land rights for tribals & justice for Zubeen

NAOBOICHA, 29 MARCH

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday announced his party's "five guarantees" for poll-bound Assam, with a focus on women's welfare, healthcare for all, land rights and justice in the Zubeen Garg death case.

He also took a swipe at the BJP-led government in the state, accusing it of indulging in rampant corruption and working "to fill the coffers" of its leaders in Delhi and their families.

Addressing a rally at Naoboicha in Lakhimpur district, Kharge listed the party's "five guarantees", which include an unconditional monthly money transfer into every woman's bank account, along with an additional Rs 50,000 assistance to women willing to set up or expand a business.

"Our transfer will be unconditional. It will not be like what the BJP government is doing, where women are asked to be members of their party," he said.

Congress Prez Mallikarjun Kharge with party's Assam chief and candidate from Jorhat constituency Gaurav Gogoi and others in Naoboicha —*PTI*

The Congress, which is looking to wrest power from the BJP in the state, pledged Rs 25 lakh cashless health insurance for all families, permanent land pattas for 10 lakh indigenous people and Rs 1,250 per month for senior citizens of the state.

A dedicated department will also be established to oversee matters concerning the elderly, Kharge said.

"We also pledge to ensure justice in the Zubeen Garg death case within 100 days of Congress coming to power," he added.

The Congress president described the "five guarantees" as the party's "blueprint for a complete transformation of Assam".

● The Congress, which is looking to wrest power from the BJP in the state, pledged Rs 25 lakh cashless health insurance for all families, permanent land pattas for 10 lakh indigenous people and Rs 1,250 per month for senior citizens of the state.

Kharge asserted that his party would fulfil all promises made to the people of Assam, and said that Congress governments in Karnataka, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh have implemented all of its poll promises.

Taking a swipe at Modi for his delayed visit to ethnic strife-hit Manipur, Kharge said it was Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who "walked through the violence-hit state" to reach out to its people. —*PTI*

Infiltration: Shah blames Congress for Assam's 'open borders'

DHEKIAJULI/ TINSUKIA, 29 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while addressing a poll rally in Dhekiajuli area in Sonitpur on Sunday, said the BJP government had successfully halted immigrant infiltration in Assam over the last decade, but added that "this is not enough as we have to send each illegal immigrant out of the country in the next five years."

Shah claimed that the Himanta Biswa Sarma government has "freed" 1.25 lakh acres of land encroached by the infiltrators, and in the next five years, Sarma will ensure that no land remains in their control.

Meanwhile, BJP is poised to secure a "hat-trick" in Assam, forming its third consecutive government under the leadership of BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. This declaration was made on Sunday by the party's National General Secretary and Assam In-charge, Nitin Nabin, during a high-level strategy meeting.

Nabin also said that the earlier state government, led by the Congress, worked only for vote bank politics and they did not create any milestone in the state during their tenure. "Under PMNarendra Modi's leadership, Assam has become a state of opportunities," he added. Elections to the 126 assembly constituencies will be held on 9 April. —*PTI*

BJP MLA booked for firing during Ram Navami

BHUBANESWAR, 29 MARCH

BJP MLA Nabin Jain has been formally charged after allegedly firing in the air during a Ram Navami procession in Titlagarh, Bolangir district. Police said Jain's personal security officer, Premachand Nag, was suspended for negligence after assisting Jain with a pistol. An FIR has been filed, and the weapon has been seized, with disciplinary action against Nag underway, said Bolangir Additional SP Himanshu Bhusan Behera. The incident, captured on video, occurred on Friday evening. Jain claimed the gun was a toy and that he fired only to encourage rally participants, not to threaten. Police registered a case under Section 125 of the BNS for endangering public safety and Section 25 of the Arms Act. —*PTI*

T'gana Assembly suspends BRS members

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

The Telangana Assembly suspended BRS members for two days after persistent protests over alleged illegal land transfers and mining. Opposition members demanded a House Committee to investigate Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy's alleged illegal mining. Despite repeated requests, protests continued near the podium. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy proposed suspending the BRS members to facilitate proceedings, which the House adopted. Opposition MLA P Kaushik Reddy's gestures towards rebel legislator Kadiyam Srihari led to his behaviour being referred to the ethics committee. Reddy also suggested a House Committee on illegal land transfers linked to Harish Rao's family. —*PTI*

—*ANI*

RaGa accuses BJP of atrocities against Dalits

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Rahul Gandhi has alleged that Gujarat's environment of hatred and discrimination against Dalit and Adivasi communities has worsened under BJP rule. He expressed solidarity with victims of the 2016 Una flogging case, saying, "This meeting was deeply distressing and gave me much pause for reflection." Gandhi highlighted the incident, where Dalit youths were publicly beaten while skinning a cow, and said, "Even after ten years, they have yet to receive justice; their wounds remain unhealed." He further stated, "The environment of hatred, discrimination, and atrocities has steadily intensified." Gandhi vowed to continue amplifying their voices. —*PTI*

IUML leader offers UAE trip to EC workers, booked

MALAPPURAM, 29 MARCH

An FIR has been registered against IUML leader Bava Haji of Mangalam in Malappuram for allegedly offering a foreign trip to booth committee members in Thavanur constituency. Police said Haji made the offer during a convention on 22 March while campaigning for Congress leader VS Joy. He reportedly announced a 15-day trip to the UAE for the booth committee delivering the highest votes in the UDF. The matter was reported to the Election Commission by LDF representatives, who found it a violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Consequently, Tirur police registered a case under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Representation of the People Act. —*PTI*

Vijay to fight from 2 seats as TVK releases full list for polls

CHENNAI, 29 MARCH

TVK chief Vijay on Sunday named his party's candidates for all 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu for the April 23 elections.

He also announced his electoral debut from two seats including Perambur in Chennai, considered a DMK stronghold.

In his maiden electoral battle, Vijay will also contest from Tiruchirappalli (East) in central Tamil Nadu.

"It will be C Joseph Vijay from these two seats," the actor-turned-politician said amid loud cheers at a meeting of party functionaries held at a five-star hotel in the city.

On the occasion, he also named and introduced nominees for the remaining 232 seats, including members of his core team.

Reiterating that the electoral contest was between his "people's alliance TVK" and the "Stalin-led alliance", he described the ruling DMK-led bloc as a "patch-up".

"I have selected candidates who will stand with the people," he said.

He exhorted Gen Z voters to turn out in large numbers for the party's 'whistle' symbol and encourage their families to back TVK candidates.

"This is a generational electoral battle," he said.

Unveiling a youth-focused agenda, Vijay promised a drug-free Tamil Nadu and collateral-free loans of up to Rs 20 lakh for students from class 12 to PhD.

Vijay also introduced the party's Puducherry candidates. —*PTI*

TVK Chief Vijay with party candidates after their introduction ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, in Chennai —*PTI*

AIADMK and DMK set for face-off in 13 seats

CHENNAI, 29 MARCH

With the opposition AIADMK retaining a majority of the Assembly constituencies in Chennai district, it is set for a direct contest with ruling DMK in as many as 13 out of 16 seats.

AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami on Sunday fielded an array of former state ministers, party seniors and women to take on the DMK in Chennai, considered as the DMK's stronghold.

Party's former ministers: B Valarmathy and Gokula Indira would take on the DMK's sitting MLA N Ezhilan, and party functionary N Chitrarasu, from Thousand Lights and Anna Nagar constituencies, respectively.

Porkodi, the wife of slain BSP leader Armstrong, has been fielded from Thiru Vi Ka Nagar against KS Ravichandran of the DMK.

Party seniors P Santhanakrishnan and Aadhi Rajaram will engage Chief Minister MK Stalin and his Deputy Udhayanidhi in a direct contest in Kolathur and Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni respectively.

Meanwhile, Stalin would launch his first phase of election campaign from Tiruvarur on 31 March. —*PTI*

Modi calls LDF, UDF 'looters', says NDA 'real A-team'

PALAKKAD, 29 MARCH

In a high-voltage rally here on Sunday ahead of the 9 April polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tore into both the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF, accusing them of "looting" Kerala and declaring that the BJP-led NDA is the state's "real A-team", not anyone's "B-team".

Instilling confidence among BJP workers, who have faced an electoral drought ever since the formation of the saffron party four decades ago, Modi asserted that the NDA would form the next government in Kerala.

"In Kerala, Team BJP and Team NDA are to form the government. With the blessings of the people of Kerala, and with all your support, we will form the government here, and we will leave no stone unturned in serving Kerala," he said.

Promising to fulfil Modi's guarantee in Kerala if voted to power, the PM said he could sense a changing political atmosphere in the state, indicating growing support for the BJP-led alliance.

"Now, the youth of Kerala have faith in the BJP and the NDA. Now, the women of Kerala have affection for the BJP and the NDA. Now, the farmers of Kerala have love for the BJP and the NDA," he said.

Modi said both fronts are targeting the BJP out of fear.

Modi also referred to sexual assault allegations against the sitting MLA of Palakkad, Rahul Mamkootathil, who won the bypoll held in 2024 on a Congress ticket, and a recent similar case involving a Congress councillor. —*PTI*

PM Narendra Modi plays 'Chenda', a traditional cylindrical percussion instrument, during a public meeting, in Kerala —*PTI*

Bribery case against me is BJP-CPI(M) sponsored: Venugopal

AICC leader KC Venugopal on Sunday alleged that the case registered against him and other Congress leaders over bribery-for-election-ticket allegation in Haryana was a "BJP-CPI(M) sponsored" move. He was responding to questions from reporters here over a case registered against him and MP Kodikunnil Suresh on charges of allegedly accepting a bribe in exchange for a seat in the Haryana Assembly election. "The petition was first submitted before the DGP under the Kerala chief minister. Why was no investigation conducted?" he asked. He said Kerala CM showing intolerance out of fear of poll defeat.

Meanwhile, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan speaking to reporters in Malappuram on Sunday termed the alleged seat-for-cash controversy linked to Congress in the Haryana Assembly elections as "extremely serious" & demanded the leadership respond to the charges. —*PTI*

WEST BENGAL POLLS

Cong names Adhir, ex-TMC MP Mausam in 1st list of 284 candidates

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Congress on Sunday released its first list of 284 candidates for the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls, fielding former state unit chief C Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury from Baharampur and ex-TMC MP Mausam Noor from Malatipur.

The Congress, which is going solo in the polls for the 294 assembly seats in the state, announced the names of 284 candidates in one go.

While Chowdhury has been fielded from Baharampur and Noor, who joined the Congress recently from Malatipur, the party also fielded Madhap Rai from Darjeeling, Abdul Hannan from Sujapur, Susmita Biswas from Dum Dum, Gautam Bhattacharya from Diamond Harbour, Souvik Mukherjee from Asansol Dakshin and Prasenjit Puitandi from Asansol Uttar.

The announcement of candidates came a day after top Congress leaders held detailed deliberations on the list for the upcoming West Bengal assembly elections during the meeting of the Central Election Committee (CEC) here.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi, along with AICC general secretary, Organisation, KC Venugopal and leaders from West Bengal, had attended the meeting.Prominent attendees also included former West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and CEC members — Ambika Soni, Madhusudan Mistry, Salman Khurshid, TS Singhdeo, KJ George, PL Punia and Amee Yajnik — besides AICC in-charge for Bengal, Ghulam Ahmed Mir. Mir had told reporters that the party had received 2,500 applications for the 294 assembly seats. "We will contest all 294 assembly seats in West Bengal, leaving none vacant. This was the wish of our workers and rank and file in the state since the beginning. We have received 2,500 applications for these 294 seats," Mir said.

Bengal assembly elections are being held in two phases on 23 and 29 April. The votes will be counted on 4 May. —*PTI*

Former Assam unit chief C Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury; ex-TMC MP Mausam Noor —*WIKIPEDIA*

Did you deliberately injure my leg during the 2021 elections? I campaigned in a wheelchair. Are you planning to kill me? ... Who are you to file a chargesheet? You should be charge-sheeted.

- Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister

EC releases third supplementary voter list

KOLKATA, 29 MARCH

The Election Commission released the third supplementary voter list under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

The poll panel, however, did not provide details on the total number of deletions or inclusions in the third list, which was made public on Saturday night.

Booth-wise lists were made available on the ECI website around 11.30 pm.

According to an EC official, the "supplementary list" refers to an additional list of voters' names that are included in the 'Under adjudication' category after the publication of the post-SIR rolls on February 28.

The EC published the second supplementary list on Friday night.

The commission had released the first supplementary list of 'Under Adjudication' voters on Monday, but remained tight-lipped on the number of deletions or the precise figure of cases disposed of on that list, drawing criticism from various quarters.

Alongside, the poll panel has also released corresponding deletion lists, which contain names removed due to reasons such as duplication, death, or shifting of residence.

A total of 58 lakh names were deleted following the enumeration phase of the SIR exercise, slashing the state's eligible electors from the initial 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore on grounds of death, migration, duplication and untraceability.

The post-SIR rolls published on February 28 further reduced the number of valid voters to just over 7.04 crore, keeping over 60 lakh names under judicial scrutiny.

Another EC official said around 10 lakh names were in the first supplementary list, and another 21 lakh in the second one. —*PTI*

CAPF officers suspended for playing carrom

The Election Commission suspended three central armed police force personnel after a purported video went viral showing them playing carrom inside a Trinamool Congress (TMC) office in Siliguri.

A departmental inquiry has been ordered into the matter. The purported video went viral on Saturday, showing one personnel playing carrom with three local youths, another standing, and a third seated on a chair. PTI, however, could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

Congress district President Sanjay Adhikari said, "Playing carrom is not a crime, but doing so inside a political party's office is inappropriate." —*PTI*

—ANI

27 LPG cylinders stolen in Mumbai from delivery van

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Twenty-seven LPG cylinders, including five filled, were stolen from a delivery tempo in Kandivali's Charkop area. Delivery man Nandkumar Ramraj Soni parked his loaded vehicle on 25 March; when he returned on 26 March, the vehicle was broken into with cylinders missing. CCTV footage shows suspects and vehicles, police said. Multiple teams are investigating, and efforts are ongoing to identify culprits. Soni said, "All 27 cylinders had been stolen." The theft raised concerns amid gas supply issues due to the West Asian war. —*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

BITS Pilani student killed in Goa road accident

PANAJI, 29 MARCH

A 26-year-old BITS Pilani student, Karan Narasimha Murthy, was killed and another injured after their motorcycle collided with an oil tanker in South Goa. The accident happened at around 5.15 pm on Saturday near a junction at Upasnagar, where the tanker was heading towards Vasco from Upasnagar. The driver, Pedro Ivo Medeira, 66, allegedly made a risky right turn without ensuring safety. Murthy, travelling towards Verna from the BITS Pilani campus, crashed into the rear of the tanker. Murthy died in hospital; Soham Adhikari is under treatment. The tanker driver was arrested and later released on bail.—*PTI*

Naxalite killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

SUKMA, 29 MARCH

A Naxalite was killed during an encounter with security forces in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh. The clash occurred in the Polampalli forest area during an anti-Naxal operation led by police, said Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan. One Naxalite died, and a search is ongoing. This incident is just two days before the Centre's 31 March deadline to eliminate Maoism. So far, 27 Maoists have been killed in separate encounters this year. Last year, security forces killed 285 Maoists across the state. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

India reveals new Yoga rules to fight lifestyle diseases

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Union Ayush Ministry has launched a comprehensive "Yoga Protocol for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Target Groups" during Yoga Mahotsav 2026, aiming to shift focus from treatment to prevention. Developed by WHOCCIND 118 at Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, the protocols are evidence-based modules integrating yoga practices into daily routines. India faces rising NCDs like diabetes, hypertension, and mental health issues, now causing nearly two-thirds of deaths. Union Minister Prataprao Jadhav emphasised yoga's preventive potential, saying, "Prevention is the future of healthcare, and yoga is India's answer to the rising burden of lifestyle diseases." The protocols target various conditions, promoting health and well-being across all ages. —*PTI*

Govt mulls jet fuel tax cut for airlines amid Iran war

Jet fuel constitutes around 40 per cent of an airline's costs

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The civil aviation ministry is exploring multiple options to minimise the impact of the West Asia conflict on airlines, including engaging with state governments to cut taxes on jet fuel.

Indian airlines' operational costs are spiralling due to surging oil prices and airspace curbs due to the West Asia turmoil, involving the US, Israel and Iran.

A highly placed source said the ministry is considering multiple options to reduce the impact of the West Asia conflict on the carriers.

Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu and the ministry have initiated discussions with chief ministers and state governments on the possibility of reducing taxes on jet fuel, the source said.

Jet fuel accounts for around 40 per cent of an airline's total operational costs.

The Value Added Tax (VAT) on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) vary from state to state.

A highly placed source said the civil aviation ministry is considering multiple options to reduce the impact of the West Asia conflict on Indian carriers —*WIKIPEDIA*

- The Value Added Tax (VAT) on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) vary from state to state. For instance, the VAT on jet fuel is 25 per cent in Delhi while it is one per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Airspace curbs due to the West Asia war have also added to the woes of airlines

For instance, VAT on jet fuel is 25 per cent in Delhi and 1 per cent in Uttar Pradesh.

Due to the West Asia conflict, carriers have also curtailed their scheduled services, especially to the region, and airspace restrictions are forcing them to take longer routes for European and North American destinations, resulting in increased fuel burn.

Amid surging oil prices, the government has cut the excise duty on petrol and diesel this week. The special additional excise duty on export of diesel and ATF has been hiked, a move aimed at prioritising their domestic availability.

According to the highly placed source, aviation watchdog DGCA is in touch with its counterparts in other countries on the situation in West Asia.

On March 26, DGCA chief Fiaz Ahmed Kidwai said airlines were facing big challenges and their operating costs were going up. — *PTI*

Gujarat school replaces LPG with biogas

AHMEDABAD, 29 MARCH

An educational institution in Gujarat has been preparing around 500 meals daily using biogas, eliminating the need for LPG, under the state's Institutional Biogas Plant Scheme, officials said.

The institution has become self-reliant in cooking gas, amid its supply concerns due to the West Asia conflict.

At the Shrimati Manekba Vinay Vihar school complex in Gandhinagar, food is cooked twice every day for around 250 students, while about 15 families on the campus also use the fuel for cooking, a government release said on Saturday.

The campus operates two biogas plants of 45 cubic metres each, with a capacity of 90 cubic metres per day, it added. Without the plants, the institute would need nearly 30 LPG cylinders per month, but currently requires none, officials said. Supported by the government scheme, the institution has become self-reliant in cooking gas, its manager, Rahul Patel, said.

With nearly 220 cows, it has sufficient dung for biogas production, and the slurry generated is used as fertiliser, enabling organic farming, he added.

The scheme launched by the Gujarat Energy Development Agency helps institutions to set up biogas plants with capacities of 25, 35, 45, 60, and 85 cubic metres.

In the last five years, 193 such plants with a combined capacity of 13,955 cubic metres per day have been installed across Gujarat.

Meanwhile, in Maharshtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar autorickshaw drivers protested near minister Shirsat's house over gas shortage.

The Bihar government has constituted a crisis management group to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods and services, safeguard the interests of migrant workers and coordinate response to any potential fallout. The group will be headed by Chief Secretary Pratyaya Amrit, says a statement issued by the state's Disaster Management Department. — *PTI*

Jail without trial is punishment, says SC while granting bail

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Observing that incarceration without trial is punishment, the Supreme Court granted bail to a Punjab resident in an attempt-to-murder case, noting that he had spent two years in jail without the trial commencing.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and PV Varale, said Pradeep Kumar alias Banu was booked for offences, including attempt to murder, in February 2024, but the prosecution has not examined any of the 23 witnesses in the case.

It set aside the 11 July 2025, order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court rejecting Kumar's bail plea.

"The prosecution wanted to examine 23 witnesses to drive home the charges against the appellant, but none has been examined," the bench said in its 13 March order.

It added that almost two years have passed since Kumar was arrested without a trial. "Incarceration without trial amounts to punishment," the bench said.

Taking an overall view of the matter, the court said that detention of the appellant pending trial is not necessary and, since the appeal deserves acceptance, the appellant may be granted bail.

Imposing conditions on Kumar, the bench said he shall be released on bail, subject to furnishing of bail bonds to the satisfaction of the trial court and subject to other terms and conditions as may be imposed by it.

If there is any breach of the terms and conditions of the bail, the trial court shall be at liberty to cancel the bail, it added. — *PTI*

HC bans night safaris in Jawai Leopard Reserve

JAIPUR, 29 MARCH

The Rajasthan High Court has prohibited night safaris and the use of drones in Pali district's Jawai Leopard Reserve, expressing concern over disturbance to wildlife due to unregulated tourism.

Justices Sandeep Shah and Pushpendra Bhati directed the state government to ensure that no safari or wildlife-spotting activity is conducted beyond the prescribed hours of 6am to 7pm.

The direction came while hearing a public interest litigation filed by a resident, Apoorva Agrawat.

The court noted that such time restrictions are in line with the norms followed at Ranthambore National Park and are necessary to minimise stress and disturbance to animals, particularly during dusk hours.

It further directed authorities to strictly prohibit the use of torchlights, searchlights, spotlights, drones or any similar devices for locating or observing wildlife, stating such practices interfere with animals' natural behaviour and habitats.

The court also ordered that any instance of misconduct by safari operators, hospitality personnel or other individuals, causing harassment or interference with wildlife, must be promptly reported and dealt with expeditiously under the law through appropriate penal and regulatory action. — *PTI*

FCRA Bill will hit church charities: Bishop

KOTTAYAM, 29 MARCH

Archbishop Thomas Tharayil of the Changanassery Archdiocese of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church has raised concerns over the proposed amendments to the FCRA and said that the Church has approached the Centre seeking a reconsideration of the Bill.

The bill to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha to modify existing norms governing foreign contributions.

Tharayil said the Church has been receiving foreign funds for decades to support its welfare projects.

"With such funds, we have been able to build schools and hospitals in small villages. Instead of recognising these as service, portraying them as anti-national is saddening. This Bill could end many charitable services," he said.

He said the Church has urged the Centre to reconsider the amendments.

Tharayil also expressed concern over the manner in which the proposal was approved by

the Union Cabinet and introduced in Parliament.

"A designated authority can take over institutions built using foreign funds and sell them if FCRA licences are not renewed. We view this with concern," he said.

Regarding the Kerala government, Tharayil said certain steps have been taken on issues raised by the Church, including appointments in institutions. However, he said there is still no clarity on the action taken by the state government on Justice JB Koshy Commission recommendations, which studied the social conditions of Christians in Kerala.

The FCRA Bill is emerging as a key campaign issue in the Assembly elections, with both UDF and LDF leaders targeting the BJP-led NDA. — *PTI*

NGT issues fiat to U'khand on protecting Mussoorie ecology

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued a notice to Uttarakhand's chief secretary for not taking any "substantial action" regarding its directions to ensure that the environment of the ecologically sensitive Mussoorie region is not disturbed.

The NGT in May 2025, issued the order after disposing of a matter in which it initiated suo motu (on its own) proceedings in view of a media report that the 2023 Joshimath disaster was a warning for Mussoorie, where unplanned construction continued.

"We dispose of this matter with a direction that Uttarakhand must implement the 19 action points along with all other remedial measures based on sound scientific principles to ensure that the environment of the Himalayan region is not disturbed," the tribunal's order had said.

The tribunal had sought an action taken report after six months.

The NGT on 24 March 2026 noted that a report had been filed by the state's additional secretary.

A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert members A Senthil Vel and Afroz Ahmad said, "After examining the report, we find that no substantial action has been taken regarding the relevant issues in the order of the tribunal."

The NGT bench said that the Uttarakhand government has not taken any significant action to implement the NGT's May 2025 order

- In May 2025, the NGT issued the order based on a media report that the 2023 Joshimath disaster is a warning for Mussoorie too, as unauthorised construction of buildings is going on in the area.

It issued a notice to the state's chief secretary and posted the matter for hearing on 14 July.

The NGT has taken cognisance of the alleged large-scale illegal tree felling, encroachment on forest land and unauthorised mining in the Kothal Gate area of Dehradun and ordered the constitution of a joint committee to probe the matter.

The NGT, principal bench, New Delhi, was hearing an application by Pradeep Sharma, who alleged illegal felling of trees, encroachment on forest land and unauthorised mining by Jain Developers. It submitted that these activities have continued despite a 'Stop Work' notice issued in 2014.

The next hearing on the matter has been scheduled for 17 July. — *PTI*

Two sisters among sex scandal victims in Goa

PANAJI, 29 MARCH

Investigations into an alleged sex scandal involving a Goa councillor's son have shown that he exploited multiple victims, including two sisters, one of them a minor, police said on Sunday.

So far, four women, including the girlfriend of 20-year-old accused Soham Naik, have filed complaints against him, they said.

The Crime Branch has received statements from four females, two of them minors, who claimed that they were sexually exploited by Naik, son of a councillor from Curchorem Municipal Council in Goa's Kushavati district, as per officials. The Curchorem police arrested Naik on 22 March for allegedly raping several girls and circulating their obscene videos. The action came after locals protested outside the Curchorem police station. The case was later handed over to the Crime Branch.

The accused is currently in the Crime Branch's custody.

The BJP said that the accused and his politician father had no connection with it. — PTI

MANN KI BAAT

Reduce sugar intake to avoid lifestyle diseases: Modi

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Prime Minister Modi has urged citizens to reduce their sugar intake and cut down on cooking oil by 10 per cent, saying such small things will help prevent obesity and lifestyle diseases.

In his radio address, 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi said many people have commented on Instagram content creator Yuvraj Dua's post, in which he had requested the PM to ask his father to reduce sugar intake. "I am happy that my request had a positive impact on his father. I would urge all of you to reduce your sugar intake, and as I have said earlier, we also need to cut down

on cooking oil by 10 per cent," Modi said.

The prime minister said he has always urged everyone to pay attention to fitness. "Now, less than 100 days are left for International Yoga Day. Almis Ji is promoting yoga through his Arvind Yoga Centre in Djibouti," he said. Almis Ji is a yoga promoter based in Djibouti, Africa.

Modi congratulated Gulveer Singh, an athlete from UP who created history by finishing third in the New York City Half Marathon, he said.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said on Sunday that Modi's mention of the "inspiring" water conservation efforts of farmers in the state's Korea district was a matter of pride for the state.

Sai said that the indigenous 'Aawa Pani Jhonki' model has become a national benchmark for grassroots innovation. He said that in Korea district, farmers are conserving water through an innovative model called 'Aawa Pani Jhonki', by building recharge ponds in their fields. — *PTI*

'Godman' Kharat's remand in rape case extended

NASHIK, 29 MARCH

A court in Nashik on Sunday extended the police custody of self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, arrested in a rape case, till April 1.

Kharat, who headed a temple trust at Mirgaon in Nashik district and whom several prominent Maharashtra politicians visited over the years, was arrested on March 18 after a woman accused him of raping her repeatedly over three years. Ten FIRs, eight for alleged sexual assault or exploitation and two for cheating, have so far been registered against him at the Sarkarwada police station in the city. The Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the matter has received over 100 complaints, most of them from women, over the phone. — *PTI*

'PM stealing credit for saving Indian Bustard'

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh recalled that in June 2010, as the then environment minister, he had written to the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, calling for conservation efforts to revive the Great Indian Bustard population in Kutch.

"As usual, all credit is being given to the PM for the initiative to protect the Great Indian Bustard in Gujarat. It is being put out that he thought of this idea in 2011," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"Just as a matter of historical interest, on 9 June 2010, the-then Union Minister of Environment and Forests had written to the-then CM of Gujarat calling for conservation efforts to revive the Great Indian Bustard population in the grasslands of Kutch. Professionals involved know this," said Ramesh, who was the environment minister between May 2009 and July 2011. Incidentally, in March 1961, ornithologist Salim Ali had wanted the Great Indian Bustard to be declared as the national bird as it was facing extinction, he said.

But in December 1963, the Indian Board of Wildlife chaired by Wadiyar of Mysore chose the peacock for what it called compelling and cultural reasons, he said.

Ornithologists consider the conservation of the Bustard as vital as that of lions and tigers, Ramesh had said. — *PTI*

Why hasn't US used military to secure Hormuz?

The shutting of Strait of Hormuz has caused a global fuel crisis, even though some ships are managing to get through –*x*

Since the United States and Israel launched their war against Iran in late February, Iran has retaliated by targeting commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz, effectively shutting down the narrow channel of water.

It's caused a global fuel crisis, even though some ships are managing to get through the strait. US President Donald Trump has given Iran an ultimatum to fully reopen the waterway to oil and gas shipments and called on NATO allies to help in the effort.

We asked naval expert Jennifer Parker, who served for 20 years with the Royal Australian Navy, to explain what kind of military force would be required to reopen the strait to commercial shipping and why the US hasn't yet taken this step.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO PREVENT ATTACKS ON SHIPS?

The geography of the region has a lot to do with this.

Iran clearly dominates the northern part of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. That proximity allows it to use its cheaper weapons, such as drones, to target ships.

Creating the conditions to make merchant shipping safe – or at least reduce the risk – requires a two-phase campaign.

The first phase is taking out Iran's ability to target ships. There are two ways to do this:

- Persuade or force Iran to stop attacking ships,
- Destroy Iran's ability to attack ships by taking out its radar facilities, command
- And control structure and weapons bunkers along the coast

The US has air power, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to identify and destroy most of these targets. Locating and destroying Iran's mass of drones will be harder, as they can be stored almost anywhere, so intelligence will be crucial here.

Once you reduce the risk through a bombing campaign, the second element of getting ships back through the strait is a reassurance campaign.

This requires airborne early warning aircraft and maritime patrol aircraft to monitor not only the Strait, but also the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf and along Iran's coastline.

Fighter aircraft would need to be stationed above the Strait and Gulf, as combat air patrol and helicopters would need to be ready to deploy against attacks, if necessary. And in the water, the US would need to station warships to provide the occasional escort.

If mines are confirmed or even suspected of being in the strait, this complicates things. The US would require an extensive and time-consuming mine clearance operation.

WHY WOULDN'T US TRY TO MILITARILY SECURE THE STRAIT?

There are four key reasons the US won't attempt to militarily secure the strait without first achieving phase one (taking out Iran's ability to target ships) — and why it hasn't been a focus of the campaign thus far.

First, it would divert military assets, such as aircraft, that are needed elsewhere to carry out Trump's war objectives.

Second, to make the strait safe for shipping, you actually need to secure not just the water, but the land on either side of it. And this would likely require ground forces – or perhaps raiding parties on Iran's coastline – which would be complicated and risky for the US military.

Third, securing shipping would require a significant number of naval ships. Realistically, you'd need one or two naval ships per escort operation. A convoy any larger than that would be at increased risk of attack, unless the US and Israel have dramatically reduced Iran's ability to target the ships.

And fourth, the military needs to think about the risk to its assets versus the benefits of opening the strait. A US warship has a crew of more than 200 personnel. Given Iran's ability to hit ships with uncrewed surface vessels, drones and cruise missiles, is it worth putting those personnel at risk before you've reduced the threats from Iran's coastline?

WHAT ABOUT MINES IN THE STRAIT?

This would be a significant challenge. But one thing first: Iran doesn't actually need to physically lay the mines; it just needs to convince the US and others that it has. This is enough to prevent civilian ships from wanting to transit through the strait.

Sometimes mines can be floating on the surface of the water, so they're visible. Often, though, mines are submerged or moored. The US would need to send in divers or remote-controlled vehicles launched from ships to remove them. This would take weeks or perhaps even months.

Although it's not been confirmed publicly, I think it's unlikely Iran would extensively lay mines. There are two reasons for this.

First, Iran's economy relies on its ability to ship its own oil from Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf through the strait. Iran does have other ports outside the strait, but they can't accommodate bigger ships, so mining would interfere with their trade.

Second, some reports have suggested Iran has used acoustic mines, a type of influence mine that detonates based on an acoustic "signature", essentially what a ship sounds like as it moves through the water. While this technology certainly exists, it is unlikely such mines would be designed to reliably differentiate between Iranian-flagged merchant vessels and those flagged to other countries.

Maintaining accurate and comprehensive signature data for large numbers of commercial vessels — particularly in a dense and dynamicshippingenvironment such as the strait — would be extremely challenging. In practice, these mines would pose risks to a wide range of shipping.

AND WHAT ABOUT IRAN'S ABILITY TO TARGET SHIPS WITH DRONES?

Iran has used different types of drones so far in the war. The uncrewed aerial craft or uncrewed surface vessels are remotely controlled and have been used to hit merchant tankers.

Reported attacks and incidents on vessels in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman

Compared with other weapons, such as missiles, it's much harder for the US and Israel to target Iran's drones on the ground because they can be launched from almost anywhere. And while they can't be built anywhere, drones don't require the same advanced manufacturing facilities as missiles. In short, they are harder to detect and wipe out.

But the US can bomb some of Iran's launching points and drone stockpiles along the coast to prevent some attacks on ships.

WHAT IS THE MAIN PRIORITY FOR THE US IN IRAN RIGHT NOW?

Although there has been much debate about regime change, the Trump administration has been clear about its four key military objectives, which are to destroy:

- Iran's ballistic missile capability
- Its nuclear capability
- Its navy (which has largely been achieved)
- And its proxy networks, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has been under attack by Israel for the past several weeks.

The destruction of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities requires significant aircraft and weaponry, as the US and Israeli bombing campaigns have already made clear. Diverting these assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz could undermine the achievement of these military objectives. —*The Conversation*

SALAR ساڈا سالار

West Asia war subdues Jerusalem's Passover, Easter

Jerusalem's major religious sites are shuttered and families are dejected and exhausted ahead of Passover and Easter as the Iran war enters its fifth week. The mood stands in stark contrast to a usual spring, when longer days herald a period of family gatherings and an influx of tourists for the major Jewish and Christian holidays.

Metal shutters are drawn on nearly all stores in the Old City, home to key holy sites, and only scattered footsteps echo on deserted stone alleyways. Vast plazas are missing the typical throngs of faithful and tourists.

Jerusalem has largely escaped past wars, with Israel's enemies appearing to be hesitant to launch missiles near the city's Muslim holy sites. But since Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran on 28 February, Jerusalem has repeatedly come under fire.

Earlier this month, an intercepted Iranian missile sprayed shrapnel on the rooftop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, just steps from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the most important sites in Christianity. The church, built on what is revered by many Christians as the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection, remains closed under Israeli military guidelines prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people.

Missile debris also hit a road leading to the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray.

From his office overlooking the plaza at the Western Wall, now closed to worshipers, Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, lamented the empty plaza.

The massive priestly blessing for Passover, which usually draws tens of thousands, will take place with just 50 worshippers, Rabinowitz said. That's the maximum allowed to pray together in the enclosed area by the Western Wall under wartime safety guidelines — reminiscent of the restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic.

EASTER CELEBRATIONS CANCELLED

The Latin Patriarchate has cancelled a procession on Sunday commemorating Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Christian celebration known as Palm Sunday.

Any other year, tens of thousands of Christians from around the world would walk down the narrow, hilly streets toward the Old City, waving palm fronds and singing.

Rami Asakrieh, the parish priest for Jerusalem's Catholics, said the community will sorely miss the procession, a deeply emotional and spiritual part of the holiday. But the cancellation is also a reminder that faith comes internally from the heart, not from external actions, he added.

Pope Leo XIV presides over Mass in St Peter's Square at the Vatican on the Catholic feast of Palm Sunday, in Jerusalem, on Sunday –*PTI*

A local Catholic high school, empty of students as classes have been cancelled, was also recently hit by debris from an Iranian missile interception, Asakrieh said.

A Franciscan priest, Asakrieh is still celebrating Mass for up to 50 parishioners at the Saint Savoir monastery's cavernous marble hall, near the centuries-old complex's music school, the Magnificat Institute. The school was built in what was once the convent's basement, which has been approved by the Israeli military as a suitable shelter.

CLOSED FOR MOST OF RAMADAN

Next to the Western Wall is Al Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third-holiest site, which has also stood empty since the war started, cancelling prayers during most of the holy month of Ramadan, which ended 10 days ago.

Fayez Dakkak, a third-generation Muslim storeowner in the Old City whose shop has catered to Christian pilgrims since 1942, said he was heartbroken over Al Aqsa's closure during the Islamic holy month.

Police orders have closed his shop, along with all non-food stores in the Old City — also part of the safety guidelines during the war.

Dakkak said for years now, as the number of pilgrims and tourists plummeted, he's barely been able to make ends meet.

CLEANING FOR PASSOVER, RUNNING FOR SHELTERS

Israelis have also grown weary after nearly a month of daily sirens, 16 civilian deaths and dozens of people seriously injured.

For seder, Jewish families are planning smaller, stripped-down ceremonial Passover dinners that commemorate the Jewish exodus from Egypt — a far cry from times when large family gatherings often welcomed relatives from abroad. Israel's Ben Gurion airport has been operating on a severely limited basis throughout the war. Many point out the irony that ahead of Passover, Israelis are fleeing the country through the land border crossing with Egypt to the Sinai desert, while the holiday commemorates the story of ancient Israelites leaving Egypt via Sinai to Israel.

Observant Jewish families are frantically cleaning for Passover to remove traces of leavening, which requires "turning the house upside-down in between running for the shelter," said Jamie Geller, a cookbook author who works in Jerusalem's Old City.

From her office at Aish, a Jewish educational institute with headquarters next to the Western Wall plaza, Geller can see where shrapnel dented and smashed rooftops, roads and a parking lot in the area. —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Toxic beauty: The Marble dump that became a tourist magnet in R'than

Endless white plains glowing under the sun, no pine trees, no chill in the air, yet the scenery looks straight out of a winter postcard. Many confuse it for Bolivia's Salt Flats, snow-clad Gulmarg or even scenic Switzerland.

This picturesque location, which has become a popular reel destination, is Asia's largest marble waste dumping yard in in Ajmer district of arid Rajasthan.

The dumping site, where over 700 tankers carrying around 22 lakh litres of marble slurry are emptied every day, attracts at least 5,000 visitors on a daily basis, with the footfall going up to 20,000 on weekends and holidays.

Due to its pristine white appearance, the dumping yard, spread over 350 acres, has also become a popular destination for pre-wedding and commercial shoots. Environmentalists and health experts, however, have flagged it as not just a health hazard but also a pollution hotspot.

Scientific studies conducted by the Central University of Rajasthan have flagged it as a "toxic tourist destination", documenting the health and ecological impacts of this unregulated dumping. The concerns also reached the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which set up a joint committee including members from state and central pollution control boards.

"These failures have led to severe contamination of groundwater, degradation of agricultural land and high levels of fugitive dust pollution, thereby endangering public health," Laxmi Kant Sharma, Environmental Science professor at Central University of Rajasthan, told PTI.

Sharma noted that the university's studies have found that the toxic contamination of water sources in the vicinity is reflected in total dissolved solid escalating 10 times above the safe limit in a 6-km radius of the dumping site.

"The concentration of lead silicate in soil and nitrate and fluoride concentrations in water were found several times higher than normal levels, indicating extreme contamination. Our study also found that the concentration of PM2.5 exceeds the limit of ambient air quality standards of PM2.5," he said.

The Kishangarh marble industry was established in the 1980s. Some 30 years ago, the Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO) allotted two dumping plots to the Kishangarh Marble Association (KMA). And that is when the first marble waste was dumped here and the slurry accumulated to the extent that it formed white plateaus and mountains. Today, there are over 1,200 marble cutting units in the city.

The dumping site, where over 700 tankers carrying around 22 lakh litres of marble slurry are emptied every day, attracts at least 5,000 visitors on a daily basis, with the footfall going up to 20,000 on weekends and holidays –*PTI*

For years, nobody paid attention. The location shot into the limelight after comedian Kapil Sharma shot a song here for his debut film "Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon" in 2016.

Then, more and more celebrities started turning up. Nora Fatehi shot her song "Chhor Denge" here, Honey Singh and Nushrratt Bharuccha came for the "Saiyaan ji" music video, and Tiger Shroff and Shraddha Kapoor shot the song "Dus Bahane" for Baaghi 3.

The place also caught the attention of pre-wedding photographers, who started bringing couples here to capture them against the white landscapes and blue ponds.

The KMA came up with an innovative model of turning the dumping yard into a tourist destination, which also has a helipad now.

While entry for visitors is free, they do need to obtain a pass from the KMA office, about a kilometre away. A visitor entering with a single digital camera must pay Rs 500, a pre-wedding shoot costs Rs 5,100 a day and a commercial shoot costs up to Rs 21,000 a day.

"The revenue is used to maintain the dumping yard. We have made changing rooms for those coming for shoots. There is a helipad too. There are restaurants and options for recreational activities. The dumping yard has put Kishangarh on the national tourism map," said KMA president Sudhir Jain.

"We have not received any health-related complaints from any tourist. In fact, the NGT also did not find anything hazardous here. We have been issued some guidelines for maintaining the area and we will follow them," Jain added.

When this PTI reporter visited the site, she could not find a single person wearing a mask. Several children, who came with their parents and grandparents, were seen rubbing their eyes. The dumping yard has it all for its visitors — horses, jeeps, kiosks for sunglasses and other photo props. Those managing these activities were seen covering their faces with towels and eyes with sunglasses.

Lined on the side are several restaurants with a 'chaupati' theme where visitors relish delicacies, even as winds blow marble dust. The place also has a dedicated kid's zone with various swings and activities available for children to enjoy a fun day.

Tankers carrying marble waste could be seen arriving every 10 minutes to offload the slurry waste, but it meant little to tourists who come here nonetheless to click perfect selfies.

Farmers in the nearby villages, point out that the marble dust often settles on their agricultural land and mixes with irrigation water, affecting crop production.

Kishangarh MLA Vikas Chaudhary, however, said the dumping yard is maintained well by the KMA and attracts tourists from across the country. —*PTI*

Mexican boats with aid to Cuba dock after going missing

MEXICO CITY, 29 MARCH

Two Mexican sailboats, the "Friendship" and "Tigermoth," which disappeared at sea en route to Cuba, have safely docked at Havana's harbour, Mexico's navy confirmed. The vessels were located 80 nautical miles from Havana by Mexican naval aircraft, with communication maintained via radio. The ships, part of the Nuestra America aid convoy, set sail from Isla Mujeres on 21 March and were expected to arrive between 27 and 28 March. The navy posted on X that "The catamaran-type vessels 'Friendship' and 'Tigermoth' arrived and docked safely at the port of Havana after their location at sea." The aid convoy, inspired by the 2025 Sumud Global Flotilla to Gaza, faced a search after losing contact, prompting the rescue operation. —*PTI*

USS Massachusetts submarine joins US Navy fleet

BOSTON, 29 MARCH

The USS Massachusetts, the first submarine named after the state, was officially commissioned on Saturday in Boston Harbour. The Virginia-class fast attack submarine, capable of diving over 800 feet, was christened in May 2023. Commanding officer Mike Siedsma, 21, Navy veteran, expressed pride: "It's very amazing to see a ship built and brought into Boston Harbour." Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey highlighted the event's significance, saying it showcases the state's maritime legacy. The crew of 147 includes 39 women, as the ban on women serving on submarines was lifted 16 years ago. Sandberg added that "they inspire every little girl out there." The submarine, costing over $2.8 billion, is equipped with 24 Tomahawk missiles. —*PTI*

12-tonnes of KitKat chocolates vanish mysteriously

SWITZERLAND, 29 MARCH

Swiss food giant Nestlé said on Saturday that a large shipment of KitKat chocolate, weighing around 12 tonnes, was stolen last week. The truck, carrying 413,793 bars of the new chocolate rang from its Italian production facility en route to Poland when it vanished. Nestlé did not specify the exact location of the theft, and as of Saturday, the vehicle and merchandise remain missing. A company spokesperson said, "We've always encouraged people to have a break with KitKat... but it seems thieves have taken the message too literally." The theft could lead to shortages across European supermarkets and the risk of the bars entering unofficial sales channels. —*Agencies*

Extreme weather in Afghanistan leaves 17 dead

KABUL, 29 MARCH

Severe flooding, a landslide and thunderstorms in parts of Afghanistan have left 17 people dead and 26 injured over the last 24 hours, authorities said Sunday. Thirteen of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, mostly in the western, central and north-western parts of the country, were affected. The severe weather also left 147 homes either completely or partially destroyed, wiped out 80 kilometres of roads and destroyed agricultural land and irrigation canals, National Disaster Management Authority spokesman Yousuf Hammad said. The number of casualties, however, could increase as crews from the country's National Disaster Management Authority survey the affected areas, Hammad reported. Earlier this year, heavy snowfall and flash floods left dozens of people dead across the country. —*PTI*

US-Israel plan to expand conflict: Iran FM

Members of a Marine Expeditionary Unit aboard the USS Tripoli—*US NAVY*

Iran says US troops would make good shark food

TEHRAN, 29 MARCH

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-30

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that US and Israel may seek to widen the scope of the ongoing conflict by drawing in other countries or staging "false-flag operations", according to Iran-state Press TV.

During a phone call with his Greek counterpart, Georgios Gerapetritis, Araghchi said that the US and Israel may compel "other countries to participate in the aggression or conduct false-flag operations against third countries."

His comments come as around 3,500 US Marines entered US CENTCOM, which manages the strikes on Iran. The amount of US assets in the region is the most since US's 2003 Iraq invasion.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf on Sunday, however, said that Tehran was waiting for a ground invasion. "The US seeks in a 15-point list what it couldn't win in war. Our forces are ready, and we will never be humiliated," he said.

Similarly, Lt-Col Ebrahim Zolfaqari, spokesman for the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters, said that American troops would become "good food for the sharks of the Persian Gulf."

Iran has reinforced its military presence around the crucial Kharg Island, while strengthening its forces along the Strait of Hormuz and long the strategic southwestern border with Iraq. —*Agencies*

FMs of Saudi, Egypt, Turkey huddle in Pak to resolve war

ISLAMABAD, 29 MARCH

Pakistan is set to host a quadrilateral summit of foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey on Sunday, to discuss the ongoing conflict in West Asia and efforts to negotiate peace, the Foreign Office said. The details of the meeting were not available at the time of publishing.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan arrived in Islamabad on Saturday at the invitation of Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, according to the Foreign Office (FO).

The four countries' Foreign Ministers will hold "in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region" during the two-day talks, the FO had said.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud arrived in Pakistan on Sunday to participate in the summit. Dar held bilateral talks with his counterparts from Egypt and Turkey. He is expected to hold talks with his Saudi counterparts separately as well.

Pakistan and Egypt also reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral relations during the meeting between Dar and Abdelatty, the FO said.

During the visit, the Ministers will hold consultations on regional developments and also call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the FO added.

Pakistan has been attempting to mediate between Iran and the US. —*Agencies*

IRAN ALLOWS 20 PAKISTANI SHIPS TO PASS HORMUZ

ISLAMABAD, 29 MARCH

Iran will allow 20 Pakistani ships to pass the Strait of Hormuz, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said on Saturday.

"Two ships will cross the Strait daily," Dar said. He described Iran's decision as "a harbinger of peace", hailing it a "constructive gesture".

Notably, Dar addressed his post directly to US Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi.

US President Donald Trump reposted the tweet.

Iran has so far only allowed select ships through the Strait, and is mulling formalising a "toll booth".

Meanwhile, Pakistan has raised the price of jet fuel for commercial aircraft again amid the ongoing fuel crisis.

Pakistan State Oil said the latest hike took jet fuel to a record PKR476.97 per litre. Since 1 March, the price has surged by PKR 288 per litre, up from PKR 188 at the beginning of the month amid volatile global energy markets. —*Agencies*

Brothers and sisters, this is our God: Jesus, King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them.

—Pope Leo XIV
during a Palm Sunday Mass

'HOLY WAR'

- The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) reported that US Generals were likening the Iran war to Armageddon, "God's divine plan" and the "imminent return of Jesus Christ".
- US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has repeatedly tied the Iran war Christianity.
- Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has referred to Iran as the "Amalekites" (biblical enemy). Using the term can be linked to genocidal intent - Bibi also called Palestinians Amalek. The Old Testament God ordered the destruction of the Amalek, including the women and children.
- The Russian Orthodox Church has repeatedly framed the Ukraine invasion as a "holy war".

'NO KINGS RALLY'

Thousands attended a 'No Kings' protest in New York on Saturday, part of a nationwide wave of demonstrations against the Trump administration. Over 3,000 protests were held across all 50 US states —*PTI*

'Russian satellite images aided Iran's hit on 15 US troops'

KYIV, 29 MARCH

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia was provided Iran with satellite intelligence to facilitate strikes on US and allied bases.

In a post on X, Zelenskyy alleged that Russian satellites repeatedly imaged Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base just days before it was targeted on 26 March. At least 15 American troops were injured.

"On 24 March, they imaged the US-UK joint military facility located in the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean," he alleged. "They also captured pictures of Kuwait International Airport and parts of the infrastructure of the Greater Burgan oil field."

"The Shaybah oil and gas field in Saudi Arabia, Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, and Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar were all imaged on 26th March," he added.

Zelenskyy said he was "100%" certain that Moscow was helping Tehran identify targets in West Asia. "We know that if they make images once, they are preparing. If they make images a second time, it's like a simulation. The third time it means that in one or two days, they will attack."

He said that Russia's daily revenue is now funding the surveillance and destruction of global security assets, as he questioned why sanctioned were lifted on Moscow's oil. Zelenskyy has been touring the Gulf states as he aims to sell Ukrainian expertise in defending against Iranian drones and Russian intelligence. —*Agencies*

Houthis fire 2nd round of missiles at Israel

DUBAI, 29 MARCH

Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed that they launched a second wave of missiles at Israel on Saturday, as they entered a month long war that has already claimed at least 3,000 lives and displaced millions.

Israel and the US are "working in very close coordination" to respond to the Houthis, Israeli military spokesperson Col Nadav Shoshani said on Sunday. The Houthis' entry could further hurt global shipping if they again target vessels in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off the Red Sea, through which about 12 per cent of the world's trade typically passes.

Meanwhile, Iran claimed that Israel-US strikes in its southwestern Khuzestan province 10,000-cubic-metre water reservoir, and began targeting aluminium plants in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates in response.

Aluminium Bahrain, which runs one of the world's largest smelters said it was assessing the damage. Blasts continued to echo across the Gulf and Iran, while at least five people were killed in an Iranian city near the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile, in Iraq, where at least 80 people have been killed by Iranian-linked militias and US forces, a drone strike on Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani's residence on Saturday sparked a blame game between Washington and Tehran.

Meanwhile, at least nine World Heath Organisation paramedics were killed by Israel in strikes in southern Lebanon. —*Agencies*

A man clears debris from a building damaged after a nearby residential building was hit in a US-Israeli strike in Tehran —*PTI*

Iran edu sites hit; IRGC warn Israel, US

TEHRAN, 29 MARCH

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warned that American and Israeli universities in the West Asian region were "legitimate targets" due to their joint strikes on Iranian academic institutions and heritage sites.

The Red Crescent Society of Iran said that at least 600 schools are damaged or destroyed. Dozens of heritage sites, which contain artefacts dating back centuries, have also sustained damaged.

On Sunday, the IRGC said that the University of Science and Technology was bombed, accusing Israel and US of targeting educational institutes.

The aftermath of US-Israeli strikes on the University of Science and Technology in Tehran, one of the oldest in Iran —*X @IRIBNEWS_IRIB*

The Isfahan University of Technology as well as the Pasteur Institute of Iran, one of the oldest medical research centres in the West Asia have also been damaged. Israel and US also killed at least 170 people in an elementary school during the initial strikes.

The IRGC urged staff, faculty, students and residents to stay 1 km away from American and Israeli university campuses in the region. —*Agencies*

Former Nepali prime minister KP Sharma Oli -*PTI*

Nepal's ex-PM Oli remanded to 5 day judicial custody

KATHMANDU, 29 MARCH

Nepal's former prime minister KP Sharma Oli was remanded to five day judicial custody by the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday, even as protests continue to erupt in various parts of the country over the arrests.

Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on Saturday for their alleged involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of 8 and 9 September last year, in which 76 were killed.

The arrests came a day after the newly formed Balendra Shah government decided to implement a probe report on Gen Z protests.

Lekhak, who was also remanded to five days of custody, was present in the district court while Oli virtually attended due to his deteriorating health. A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court as Oli's CPN-UML continued to protest.

Meanwhile, former energy minister and Nepali Congress leader Deepak Khadka was arrested for alleged money laundering. —*PTI*

5-DECADE LONG CAREER

'Back to the Future', 'Top Gun' star James Tolkan no more

NEW YORK, 29 MARCH

Actor James Tolkan, known for his roles as a cigar-chomping naval commander in 'Top Gun' and a gruff high school administrator in 'Back to the Future,' has died. He was 94.

Tolkan died on Thursday in Lake Placid, New York, where he lived, his booking agent, John Alcantar, said Saturday. A brief obituary published on the 'Back to the Future' website said Tolkan died "peacefully".

In 'Back to the Future,' Tolkan portrayed the bow tie-wearing vice principal Gerald Strickland, who eyeballed students for trouble in the halls of the fictitious Hill Valley High School — in particular Marty McFly, played by Michael J Fox.

"You got a real attitude problem, McFly," Tolkan's character says in the 1985 film. "You're a slacker. You remind me of your father when he went here. He was a slacker, too."

Tolkan also appeared in 'Top Gun' as commanding officer Tom "Stinger" Jardian. Near the end of the film, when Jardian asks Tom Cruise's character, Capt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, about his choice for future duty, Mitchell replies that he wants to be a Top Gun instructor.

"God help us," Tolkan's character replies, laughing.

Born in Calumet, Michigan, Tolkan graduated from high school in Arizona and served in the Navy during the Korean War. He eventually made his way to New York, where he spent a quarter century acting in theatre roles. He was a member of the original ensemble cast of 'Glengarry Glen Ross.' —*PTI*

Actor James Tolkann —*x*

20 JUNE, 1931 - 29 MARCH, 2026

- A brief obituary published on the 'Back to the Future' website said James Tolkan died 'peacefully'.

N Korea tests missiles capable of hitting US, allies

SEOUL, 29 MARCH

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed a test of an advanced engine for weapons, claiming it enhances the country's military capability, state media reported on Sunday. The test signals more agile, harder-to-detect missiles targeting the US and allies.

Critics, like Lee Choon Geun from South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute, suggest North Korea's report could be "bluffing," as key details like total combustion time were not disclosed.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said Kim watched the ground jet test using composite carbon fibre, with a maximum thrust of 2,500 kilotons, up from about 1,970 kilotons in a September test.

North Korea's solid-fuel missile may be delayed or improved—possibly with Russian help—enabling smaller, multiple warheads to counter US defences. —*PTI*

Markets lose Rs 1.14L crore in March

Total foreign portfolio investors' outflow reached Rs 1.27 lakh crore so far this year

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 1.14 lakh crore (about USD 12.3 billion) from domestic equities in March, weighed down by the Iran war, a weakening rupee and concerns over the impact of elevated crude oil prices on India's growth.

With one trading session still remaining, the outflows could extend further. The previous record for the highest monthly exodus stood at Rs 94,017 crore in October 2024.

Total foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) outflow has reached Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2026, as per National Securities Depository Limited data.

FPIs have remained persistent sellers throughout March, offloading equities worth Rs 1,13,380 crore in the cash market till 27 March.

The sharp sell-off follows a strong rebound in February, when foreign FPIs pumped in Rs 22,615 crore, the highest monthly inflow in 17 months.

Market participants attributed the sustained selling pressure to global macroeconomic headwinds and geopolitical uncertainty —*AI IMAGE*

Market participants attributed the sustained selling pressure to global macroeconomic headwinds and geopolitical uncertainty. VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Investments, said the weakness in global equity markets, the steady depreciation of the rupee, fears of decline in remittances from the Gulf region and concerns surrounding the impact of high crude prices on India's growth and corporate earnings contributed to the sustained selling by FPIs.

The selling has been driven by a combination of elevated US bond yields and tightening global liquidity, which have improved the relative attractiveness of developed market fixed income, Himanshu Srivastava, Principal - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

While Indian market valuations have corrected alongside the recent market decline, they continue to remain relatively elevated compared to several emerging market peers, which may still be prompting selective profit booking and reallocation.

There is a risk-off trend in equity markets globally after the war broke out in West Asia. —*PTI*

Iran war, crude prices to impact stock market: Analysts

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Developments related to the ongoing month-long war in West Asia, its impact on crude oil prices, and global trends would continue to be key drivers for domestic equities in the holiday-shortened week ahead, analysts said.

Besides, the rupee-dollar trend and trading activity of foreign investors would also play a crucial role in dictating investors' sentiment.

Stock markets would remain closed on Tuesday and Friday for Shri Mahavir Jayanti and Good Friday, respectively.

Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 1.14 lakh crore from domestic equities this month amid the widening conflict in West Asia and a weakening rupee.

The West Asia conflict started on 28 February. While the US and Israel attacked Iran, the Islamic Republic retaliated by targeting Washington's allies in its neighbourhood and Tel Aviv.

"Elevated oil prices are expected to keep pressure on markets, while any pullback could prompt short-covering and support a rebound," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Sensex lost 949.74 points or 1.27 per cent, and Nifty tanked 294.9 points or 1.27 per cent. —*PTI*

Intellius Recode files for Rs 117 crore IPO

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Technology solutions provider, Intellius Recode Ltd has filed preliminary papers with the market regulator, Sebi, to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating Rs 117 crore and an offer for sale of up to 12.9 lakh equity shares by existing shareholders. The company intends to utilise the net proceeds from the fresh issue towards funding the development of its digital workers, payment of sub-contracting fees related to their development, and for general corporate purposes. Inga Ventures is the book-running lead manager of the issue. The company's digital workers are AI-enabled software products designed to function as virtual employees. —*PTI*

— *PTI*

NSE to launch Brent crude futures from 13 April

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) is launching Dated Brent Crude Oil futures, under "BRCRUDEOIL", on 13 April, expanding its global oil benchmark options. The introduction of the contract aims to provide market participants with a hedging tool aligned with international crude benchmarks. The futures contracts will be listed on a monthly basis, with trading scheduled from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 11.30pm. The contracts will be cash-settled, with the final settlement price determined based on the monthly simple average of Platts Dated Brent assessments, converted into rupees using the RBI's USD-INR reference rate. The exchange said the contracts will follow quality specifications as prescribed by S&P Global Energy (Platts). —*PTI*

Deloitte dismisses AI job loss fears amid India hiring

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Dismissing widespread fears that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will lead to massive job displacements, Deloitte South Asia Chief Operating Officer (COO) Nitin Kini said the consulting giant's ongoing drive to hire 50,000 professionals across India is heavily focused on upskilling employees to solve "higher-order" business problems. Kini outlined Deloitte's upcoming plans to launch a Quantum Centre of Excellence. He said that Deloitte does not view AI as a tool to "disintermediate" layers of the workforce, but rather to unlock efficiencies. The firm has already trained nearly 30,000 of its people on AI, with another 20,000 transitioning to work with in-house built platforms. India currently hosts a third of Deloitte's global workforce. —*PTI*

Mcap of 7 firms drops by Rs 1.75L cr; RIL loses Rs 89k cr

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The combined market valuation of seven of the top most valued firms tumbled by Rs 1.75 lakh crore last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit, in tandem with a weak trend in equities.

The BSE benchmark Sensex lost 949.74 points or 1.27 per cent, and the NSE Nifty tanked 294.9 points or 1.27 per cent.

"Markets ended on a weaker note, reflecting heightened volatility amid fluctuating global cues and escalating West Asia crisis. The week was marked by sharp swings, with early losses driven by concerns over energy supply disruptions, a weakening rupee, which touched a record low, and rising volatility," Ajit Mishra, SVP, research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

This was followed by a mid-week recovery on hopes of a temporary de-escalation in US-Iran tensions, he noted.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries eroded by Rs 89,720.3 crore to Rs 18,24,515.62 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation tanked by Rs 37,248.59 crore to Rs 11,64,018.69 crore.

State Bank of India lost Rs 35,399.42 crore from its market valuation, which stood at Rs 9,41,569.15 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank dropped by Rs 8,121.76 crore to Rs 8,83,551.30 crore, and that of Bharti Airtel declined by Rs 2,480.42 crore to Rs 10,50,413.33 crore.

Hindustan Unilever's mcap diminished by Rs 2,091.13 crore to Rs 4,87,540.19 crore, and that of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) dipped by Rs 271.35 crore to Rs 8,64,668.65 crore.

However, the market valuation of Larsen & Toubro surged by Rs 18,051.68 crore to Rs 4,90,536.19 crore.

The mcap of Bajaj Finance jumped Rs 8,680.36 crore to Rs 5,25,395.48 crore. —*PTI*

GENERAL &LIFE INSURANCE

Jio Fin to begin insurance biz in 2026

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Jio Financial Services (JFS) plans to commence general and life insurance operations this year, a senior company executive has stated.

The company currently has no immediate plans to venture into unsecured and consumer durable lending sectors.

"We hope to start insurance manufacturing in 2026, subject to regulatory approvals," said Hitesh Sethia, JFS's chief executive and managing director said.

The firm, which recently entered the reinsurance arena, will partner with the French company Allianz through a joint venture for its general and life insurance businesses. Sethia added that the company is actively building the necessary teams to support its insurance expansion.

Promoted by entities linked to India's wealthiest individual, Mukesh Ambani, JFS has already entered lending sectors such as home loans, asset and wealth management, and reinsurance, either independently or via partnerships.

Sethia explained that JFS maintains boundaries based on risk and capital, focusing currently on secured lending products to prime or near-prime customers. The company operates in about 20 cities with the best customer segments.

He acknowledged higher non-performing loans in consumer durables and unsecured categories, noting that home loans have a much lower rate. —*PTI*

Reliance SEZ tax exemptions unclear after fuel duty revamp

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The applicability of newly reimposed export windfall taxes on shipments of diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) from Reliance Industries' SEZ refinery remains the key uncertainty, following India's fuel duty overhaul, according to analysts.

Under the revised framework, India has imposed export duties of Rs 21.50 per litre on diesel and Rs 29.50 per litre on ATF while keeping petrol exports exempt. This came alongside a Rs 10 per litre cut in excise duty on petrol and diesel.

It remains unclear whether exports from Reliance's SEZ refinery will retain exemptions, as they did under the 2022 windfall tax regime, Investec said.

Reliance owns and operates two refineries at 33 million tonnes per year unit catering to the domestic market and a 35.2 million tonnes only-for-exports SEZ unit.

If SEZ exports remain exempt, Reliance's refining margins would be largely insulated from the new levies, preserving the competitiveness of its export-oriented operations.

Citi Research said the duty changes ease pressure on oil marketing companies while limiting Reliance's refining gains, cutting petrol/diesel marketing losses from Rs 35–40 per litre to Rs 19–23. Consequently, OMCs' breakeven crude rises from USD 65 per barrel to USD 80. —*PTI*

Fin Ministry flags external risks as trade deficit widens

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

India faces increasing external sector pressures amid a volatile global environment, according to the Finance Ministry's Monthly Economic Review for March 2026.

The report highlights a deterioration in trade dynamics, widening imbalances, and emerging stress from capital flows and commodity prices.

It states that India's merchandise exports declined marginally by 0.8 per cent year-on-year, reflecting subdued external demand amid global uncertainties, while imports surged by 24.1 per cent, mainly driven by gold and silver imports.

The trade deficit widened sharply, with the monthly figure reaching USD 27.1 billion in February 2026, up from USD 14.4 billion the previous year.

The review notes that India's current account deficit increased to 1.3 per cent of GDP in Q3 FY26, from 1.1 per cent, mainly due to the trade imbalance, despite strong services exports. Capital account challenges persist as global risk aversion leads to negative portfolio flows, contributing to market volatility and pressure on the rupee.

Rising crude oil prices, driven by tensions in West Asia, further threaten the trade balance. The report concludes that these factors have led to depreciation pressures on the Indian Rupee, reflecting a challenging external environment. —*PTI*

Vedanta flags bid reversal in Jaypee case

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Anil Agarwal, head of Vedanta, claimed that the company received written confirmation that it had won the bid for a Jaypee Group asset, but the decision was subsequently reversed, without providing reasons.

Agarwal stated on social media that Vedanta was "declared the highest bidder publicly" to acquire Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) through insolvency proceedings.

He attached a media report indicating that, after the September 5 bid opening, Vedanta was informed in writing of its victory. However, he added, "after some days, the decision was changed."

Gautam Adani's group remained the only other bidder, with the Committee of Creditors (CoC) evaluating bids and submitting them for NCLT approval. The NCLT's Allahabad bench approved Adani's bid, which Vedanta challenged before the NCLAT.

The tribunal did not stay the approval last week, and Agarwal refrained from further comment, saying "that is for the right forum" to decide.

He emphasised that Vedanta has no attachment to the asset, and that commitments made should not be withdrawn, following teachings from the Bhagavad Gita. —*PTI*

NCLAT says no to Demat account freezing

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) dismissed appeals by BSE challenging its power to defreeze Demat accounts of companies undergoing insolvency resolution.

A two-member bench ruled that the NCLT has jurisdiction under Section 60(5) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) to entertain such applications and pass directions.

BSE argued that the NCLT lacked authority, contending the issue fell within securities law.

The tribunal noted that the applications, filed by resolution professionals for companies like Future Corporate Resources and Liz Traders and Agents, aimed to sell shares and recover dues. The NCLT ordered BSE to lift the freeze in October 2025 and July 2024, which was challenged and dismissed by the NCLAT. The accounts were frozen due to unpaid dues and default. —*PTI*

'UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICE'

Ola Electric asked to refund faulty scooter

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

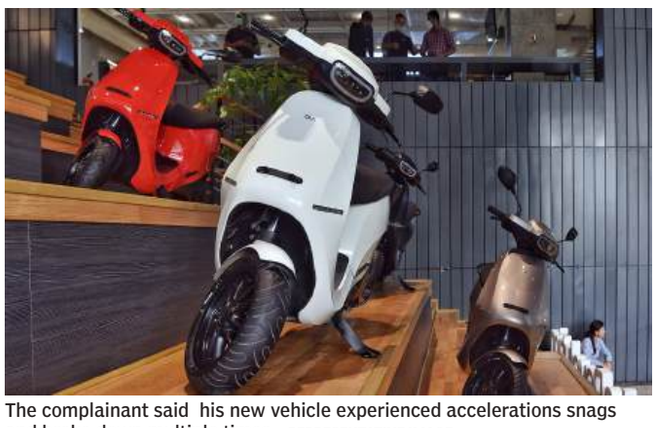
A consumer commission in Thane has asked Ola Electric Technologies to replace a defective electric scooter or provide a full refund, citing "sheer deficiency" in customer service.

The Bengaluru-based manufacturer was also engaged in "unfair trade practice", the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (Additional Thane) noted.

The complainant, a Navi Mumbai-based advocate, purchased the Ola electric scooter in July 2024 for Rs 96,997.

On his first major ride, just two days after delivery, the vehicle experienced acceleration snags and broke down multiple times in traffic.

He noted that during a ride on August 29, 2024, the battery level plummeted from 21 per cent to 3 per cent within just 500 meters. It led to a sudden halt of the vehicle, which could have caused a fatal accident, the complainant claimed.



The complainant said his new vehicle experienced accelerations snags and broke down multiple times—*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

When the issue was not resolved even after multiple communications, the advocate approached the commission, alleging a deficiency in service on the part of the company.

Despite repeated emails and WhatsApp messages, the complainant received no response until he took his grievances to X (formerly Twitter).

The complainant was informed by his insurance provider that the scooter had not even been reported to the designated garage for service.

When the vehicle was finally returned to the customer, it was in "unclean condition, having scratch marks," the order pointed out.

If the vehicle cannot be replaced, then the company must refund the full cost of Rs 96,997 along with 6 per cent annual interest. The company must also pay Rs 20,000 for hardship and Rs 15,000 for litigation expenses. —*PTI*

8 Co-founders exit xAI since Jan, Ross Nordeen latest to quit

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Ross Nordeen, the last of Elon Musk's original co-founding team at xAI has now left the company.

Nordeen, one of 11 people who built the artificial intelligence startup alongside Musk, departed on 27 March. His employee badge on X has since been removed.

Since January, eight co-founders have exited a company valued at around $250 billion and which claims to be a serious challenger in the global AI race.

The 36-year-old Michigan Tech graduate reported directly to Musk and functioned as his primary operational lieutenant — coordinating priorities, driving execution and keeping the company moving across multiple workstreams.

Nordeen followed Musk from Tesla, where he served as a technical programme manager on the Autopilot team Nordeen helped Musk execute sweeping staff reductions at Twitter in 2022.

Ross Nordeen; Elon Musk —*PTI*

Among those who have departed since January are Manuel Kroiss, Guodong Zhang, Zihang Dai, Toby Pohlen, Jimmy Ba, Tony Wu and Greg Yang. the departures happened after SpaceX's merger with xAI in February.—*PTI*

— PTI

Ben Stokes' return delayed due to injury

LONDON, 29 MARCH

England's Test captain Ben Stokes is set for a longer recovery period, delaying his return to competitive cricket. Initially expected back early next month, Stokes sustained a facial injury in February while training, resulting in a broken cheekbone and surgery, according to the ICC website. He has been out since the Ashes series in Australia, where he also suffered a groin injury. Durham's coach Ryan Campbell said, "He was going to play the first game. He's been training so hard to be ready, but we have to wait for the specialists to clear him." Campbell added, "The incident was worse than you'd think, and we are lucky he got away with it."—*PTI*

Samson, Jadeja to take on ex-pals as CSK meets RR

Samson is in his prime form, after India's T20 WC win

GUWAHATI, 29 MARCH

Sanju Samson is set for an emotional clash against Rajasthan Royals, the side he led and shaped for over a decade, as he turns out for Chennai Super Kings, while Ravindra Jadeja will also face his former franchise, adding a poignant sub-plot to the IPL match between the two teams here on Monday.

For more than a decade, Samson was synonymous with RR, their batting mainstay, leader and all-time leading run-scorer who guided them to the 2022 final.

Much like MS Dhoni at CSK, Samson was the Royals' identity, but in a blockbuster swap that sent Jadeja back to RR, the Kerala batter now finds himself in yellow, adding a new dimension to CSK's evolving core.

Samson also arrives in prime form, having played a decisive role in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign.

His hat-trick of 50-plus scores in must-win games against West Indies, England and New Zealand has made him the star of the nation as the unassuming keeper-batter will come with a renewed self-belief.

He along with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who are set to open also, will also form the core leadership of the team who will miss Dhoni for at least two weeks due to a calf strain.

Dhoni has not travelled with the side to Guwahati as his absence will put Samson and Gaikwad in the spotlight.

Teams (from)

Rajasthan Royals: Riyan Parag (c), Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Lhuan-Dre Pretorius, Ravi Singh, Aman Perala, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, Adam Milne, Brijesh Sharma, Jofra Archer, Kuldeep Sen, Kwena Maphaka, Nandre Burger, Ravi Bishnoi and Sandeep Sharma.

CSK: Sanju Samson, Dewald Brevis, Shivam Dube, Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Ayush Mhatre, Matt Henry, Akeal Hosein, Noor Ahmad, Jamie Overton, Matthew Short, Khaleel Ahmed, Zak Foulkes, Anshul Khamboj, Nathan Ellis, Sarfaraz Khan, Rahul Chahar, Kartik Sharma, Urvil Patel, Aman Khan, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Prashant Veer, Shreyas Gopal, Gurjapneet Singh and Mukesh Choudhary.

Match starts: 7.30pm.

ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

The championships assume added significance as finalists will earn direct entry into the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games —*PTI*

Indian boxers seek strong start in Asian meet

ULAANBAATAR, 29 MARCH

Indian boxers will aim for a good show at the Asian Championships, beginning here on Monday, as they look to make the most of their opportunities in a packed season and secure direct berths for the multi-sport events later this year.

The tournament marks the first major outing in a loaded season that includes the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (July-August), the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan (September-October) and the World Boxing Cup Finals in Uzbekistan.

Apart from the medal rush, the championships assume added significance as finalists will earn direct qualification for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

The Indian team has been acclimatising in Mongolia for the past 15 days, training and sparring with boxers from Mongolia, China, Jordan and Thailand.

The women's challenge will be led by Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg), reigning world champions Minakshi Hooda (48kg) and Jaismine Lamboria (57kg).

While Lovlina comes in after a gold-winning effort at the Boxam International in Spain in February, it will be the first international outing since November for Zareen, Hooda and Jaismine.

TEAM

Women: Minakshi (48kg), Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Jaismine Lamboria (57kg), Priya (60kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Pooja Rani (80kg), Alfiya Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg).

Men: Vishwanath Suresh (50kg), Jadumani Singh Mandengbam (55kg), Sachin (60kg), Aditya Pratap Yadav (65kg), Deepak (70kg), Akash (75kg), Ankush (80kg), Lokesh (85kg), Harsh Choudhary (90kg), Narender Berwal (90+kg). —*PTI*

Orphaned teen lifter overcomes injury to win gold

RAIPUR, 29 MARCH

On the verge of quitting weightlifting after losing both his parents before he was 16, Mizoram's Isak Malsawmtluanga overcame a back injury to clinch the men's 60kg gold medal at the Khelo India Tribal Games here.

Isak came up with a strong showing in clean and jerk, after finishing the snatch section in second place, to clinch the gold medal with a total of 235kg and was immediately embraced by his uncle, who has been the guiding force behind the teenager.

The personal tragedy had left the 18-year-old devastated but the support from his childhood coach and his uncle and aunt salvaged his sporting career. Isak's father Heming Malsawmtluanga had died in a bike accident in 2018, the same year he began training to become a weightlifter.

"At that time my childhood coach Soma asked me to continue weightlifting," Isak told SAI Media.

But just when Isak's performance graph began to flourish through a silver medal in the 60kg category at the Youth National Championships held in Himachal in 2024, another setback followed. His mother diagnosed with cancer in 2024, succumbed to her illness later that year, placing the family under severe strain.

"Losing both my parents broke me. I had almost decided to quit weightlifting but my uncle again persuaded me to continue," Isak said. —*PTI*

Devdutt's ruthlessness powers RCB charge

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Devdutt Padikkal whipped pacer Jaydev Unadkat's full ball on his pads over backward square leg for a six.

It was not an unusual sight for a batter for whom flicks form one of the bread and butter shots.

But it was unprecedented because Devdutt has seldom hit a six off the first ball. The left-hander tends to settle down before unleashing himself on the bowlers.

However, the left-hander shed his linear nature against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2026 opener here on Saturday, and it was just the beginning.

> **We are not here with the mindset that we have to defend anything, what we did in 2025 has passed. We are here with the mindset that in 2026 we have to tick all the boxes and that will help us win the trophy this year**
>
> -Rajat Patidar, RCB skipper

In the next 10 balls he faced, Devdutt produced two more sixes and three fours, racing to 34 in 11 balls, strike-rate hovering over 300.

In fact, his 26-ball 61 represented the transformation of his batting since 2024 or early 2025.

In this period, Devdutt has made 543 runs at an average of 60.33 in the Ranji Trophy, 725 runs at 90.62 in the Vijay Hazare Trophy and 309 runs at a strike rate of 167.02 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Karnataka coach Yere Goud was not one bit surprised by his ward's outing against SRH.

"I think that boils down to his preparation. He is very clear about it. He goes about it keeping in mind the probability phase of plays — it changes according to where he is batting from — powerplay, mid-overs or the rest. I think that's contributing to his consistency," Goud said. —*PTI*

Sabalenka beats Coco Gauff in Miami Open final

MIAMI GARDENS, 29 MARCH

World No 1 Aryna Sabalenka clinched the Miami Open title on Saturday, defeating fourth-ranked Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3. The match lasted 2 hours, 11 minutes and ended with Gauff getting broken for the fourth time with a wide backhand.

Sabalenka utilised her signature power to overwhelm Gauff with groundstrokes, securing her place in history as the first woman to complete the "Sunshine Double"—winning both Indian Wells and Miami back-to-back—since Iga Swiatek in 2022.

It was Sabalenka's second straight title at the Miami Open, Gauff's hometown tournament, and put her ahead of Gauff in their head-to-head record, 7-6. Gauff fought back to force the third set, but couldn't maintain the momentum she appeared to get from the deafening crowd supporting her. Gauff's off-and-on serve created seven double faults while Sabalenka registered none.

Sabalenka broke Gauff in the first game of the third set, helped by a Gauff double fault and an unforced error. On break point, Sabalenka crunched a backhand winner.

"I was disappointed about that first game of the third set up 30-0 with momentum,'' Gauff said. "It was an important game to win in that moment.''

The match was attended by Kai Trump, US President Donald Trump's granddaughter and a golfer at the University of Miami. She posted a photo with Sabalenka at the tournament on social media on Friday. —*PTI*

Boxer Mary Kom mulls turning pro

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Olympic bronze medallist and six-time world champion Indian boxer M C Mary Kom on Sunday said she is considering a move into professional boxing. The 43-year-old, who became the first Indian woman boxer with an Olympic medal when she won bronze in the 2012 London Games, is past the age eligibility to compete on the amateur circuit.

"What can I say about the high points? Winning six World Championships was incredible. Although I reached a stage where age restrictions prevented me from competing further in amateur boxing for the country, a new opportunity has surfaced in Professional Boxing," she said on the sidelines of Sundays on Cycle event.

"I am currently taking some time to consider it. I am working hard and trying to make a comeback to show people what I can still do.

Widely considered one of the greatest amateur boxers, Mary Kom also underlined her commitment to grassroots development through her academy in Manipur.

As India eyes hosting major global events such as the 2030 Commonwealth Games and possibly the 2036 Olympics, Mary Kom stressed the importance of sport in building international recognition.

"Sports development is absolutely essential. Without sports, it is difficult for a country to build a global reputation," she said. —*PTI*

BELGIUM THRASH US AHEAD OF FIFA WORLD CUP

ATLANTA, 29 MARCH

The United States men's football team received a stark wake-up call as Belgium handed them a 5-2 defeat in a friendly match. The Americans, preparing for the upcoming World Cup, allowed five consecutive goals after opening the scoring, marking their worst home defeat since 1959, according to Opta. U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino criticised the team's mindset, saying, "We cannot arrive with the wrong idea of that we are so good, and we are Americans. Always after the games when the team wins, (it's) because we fight, we were aggressive, we were intense, yes? When we drop in that intensity — we saw today."

Belgium's players celebrate a goal on their way to a 5-2 thrashing of the United States in a pre-World Cup friendly —*PTI*

Weston McKennie scored in the 39th minute to give the 15th-ranked US side a lead over No. 9 Belgium, but the hosts quickly responded. Belgian goals came from Dodi Lukébakio, Zeno Debast, Amadou Onana, and Charles De Ketelaere.

Patrick Agyemang scored for the United States in the 87th minute. —*PTI*

Indians shine in World Wushu Championship

TIANJIN, 29 MARCH

Indian athletes secured two bronze medals while four others moved to the finals in different categories at the 10th World Wushu Championship here on Sunday.

In the semifinal matches, India's Anu faced a tough contest against China's Zhang Lining but lost the bout, earning a bronze medal in the girls section while in the boys' semifinal, Goutam Mankas was defeated by his opponent to secure another bronze. Furthermore, four Indian players registered victories to enter the finals. Upendro Thougam defeated Ahmed Mohamed of Egypt to reach the final, while Pama Heiba Singh beat Alimou Sy of Senegal to secure a place in the title clash.

Yuvraj defeated Xiviel of the Philippines to enter the final , while Victor overcame Karim of Egypt to enter the summit clash. —*PTI*

2ND WIN IN A ROW

Mercedes' Antonelli wins Japanese GP

SUZUKA, 29 MARCH

Mercedes' 19-year-old Italian sensation Kimi Antonelli secured his second consecutive Formula 1 victory on Sunday, winning the Japanese Grand Prix ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri. Antonelli finished a comfortable 13.7 seconds ahead of the Australian.

Charles Leclerc of Ferrari was third with George Russell of Mercedes in fourth. McLaren's Lando Norris was fifth with sixth for Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari at the Suzuka circuit in central Japan. Antonelli won his first F1 race two weeks ago in China, the second-youngest winner in history. The youngest was Max Verstappen in 2016 at 18. Antonelli has 72 points from three races and has now become the youngest to lead the season drivers' standings.

Despite a poor start that saw him drop to sixth after the opening lap, Antonelli mounted a relentless comeback —*PTI*

Russell was second in China two weeks ago and won the season-opening race in Australia, which means Mercedes has victories in the first three races of 2026.

Despite a poor start that saw him drop to sixth after the opening lap, Antonelli mounted a relentless comeback. While McLaren's Piastri initially dominated from the front, the race shifted on Lap 22. In Japan, Antonelli started from pole with Russell alongside him, but neither got a great start with Piastri beating both to the first turn and holding the early lead.

"Definitely, it's been (the starts) a weak point this year and I need to improve that because you can easily win or lose races with that." Antonelli said. But Antonelli and Mercedes again showed that they have mastered the 2026 car configuration, which features a 50-50 split between IC and electrical power. —PTI

Tiger Woods faces uncertain future after DUI arrest

STUART, 29 MARCH

Tiger Woods was released from jail and driven away in a dark SUV, his face vacant as his mug shot was taken. He now faces charges of driving while intoxicated, property damage, and refusing to submit to a urine test, after spending eight hours in Martin County jail near his home on Jupiter Island, Florida. Woods' manager, Mark Steinberg, did not respond to requests for comment.

This incident comes at a difficult time for Woods, who had hoped to prepare for the Masters on 9-12 April. Woods, who turned 50 last year, said, "This body, it doesn't recover like it did when it was 24, 25." He was also close to a decision on whether to be the US. Ryder Cup captain for 2027 in Ireland, with officials from the PGA of America yet to comment.

Woods is scheduled to attend a project launch at "The Patch" in Augusta on 5 April, alongside Masters chairman Fred Ridley. He also chairs the PGA Tour's Future Competition Committee, which is reshaping tournament formats. The PGA Tour declined to comment on his arrest.

The arrest is Woods' second in nine years and his fourth car crash since 2009. Martin County Sheriff John Budensiek said Woods' Land Rover was travelling at "high speed" when it hit a trailer and flipped. Woods was uninjured, climbing out through the passenger window. The sheriff indicated Woods may have taken medication, but a test showed "triple zeroes" for alcohol. Woods declined a urine test, preventing definitive results. —*PTI*